

PART I:

FIRST CALL FOR CHILDREN

We were all children once – and we are now the parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts of children.

Children’s needs and wishes, hence, are not difficult to understand. They want, expect and have the right to the best possible start in life. And we must do all we can to ensure that they, and the generations of children to come, receive this – a safer, fairer, healthier world.

The United Nations itself was born out of this conviction. Its Charter pledges to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war...to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights...and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.” And with each successive generation of children since the UN was established, more than half a century ago, we have seen both the keeping and the breaking of that promise. On the one hand, each new generation of children has had a greater chance of surviving and thriving than the one before. On the other hand, despite unprecedented global prosperity, far, far too many fall by the wayside. No one who respects the UN’s founding vision can feel that responsibilities to the world’s children have been fulfilled.

To carry forward the vision of the UN Charter, in September 1990 the largest group of world leaders ever convened until then sat down at an immense circular table at UN Headquarters in New York and discussed, in frank and impassioned terms, their responsibilities to children. For those present, the World Summit for Children was a transcendent experience. Just weeks earlier, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, had entered into force, ratified more quickly and by more countries than any previous human rights instrument. Proclaiming that “there can be no task nobler than giving every child a better future,” the 71 Heads of State and Government and 88 other senior delegates promised to protect children and to diminish their suffering; to promote the fullest development of their human potential; and to make them aware of their needs, their rights and their opportunities.

They also promised to uphold the far-reaching principle that children had ‘first call’ on all resources, that they would always put the best interests of children first – in

“The well-being of children requires political action at the highest level. We are determined to take that action.”

*– Declaration of the World Summit for Children,
30 September 1990*

good times or bad, in peace or in war, in prosperity or economic distress. “We do this,” the leaders declared, “not only for the present generation, but for all generations to come.”

Leaders committed themselves to a World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and a Plan of Action that included 27 specific goals relating to children’s survival, health, nutrition, education and protection. The goals represented the clearest and most practical expression of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This ambitious but feasible agenda was to be achieved by the year 2000 through a series of actions at the national and international levels, including the formulation of national and subnational plans of action; the re-examination of existing national and international programmes, policies and budgets to see how higher priority could be given to children; the encouragement of families, communities, social and religious institutions, business and the mass media to support the Summit’s goals; the establishment of mechanisms for the regular collection and publication of data on children; and the promotion of efforts by government, industry and academic institutions to achieve technological breakthroughs, more effective social mobilization and better delivery of services.

The Summit, remarkable for its clear focus on achievable goals, was historic also for specifying systematic follow-up procedures and rigorous monitoring of progress towards them. Some 155 countries prepared national programmes of action (NPAs) aimed at implementing the Summit goals; many prepared subnational plans as well. Over 100 countries conducted monitoring surveys with the capacity-building support and active involvement of many UN agencies, multi-

lateral and bilateral donors, universities, research institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Responding to the call of the Summit, a record 192 countries have ratified or signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Those that have ratified are required to report on their progress

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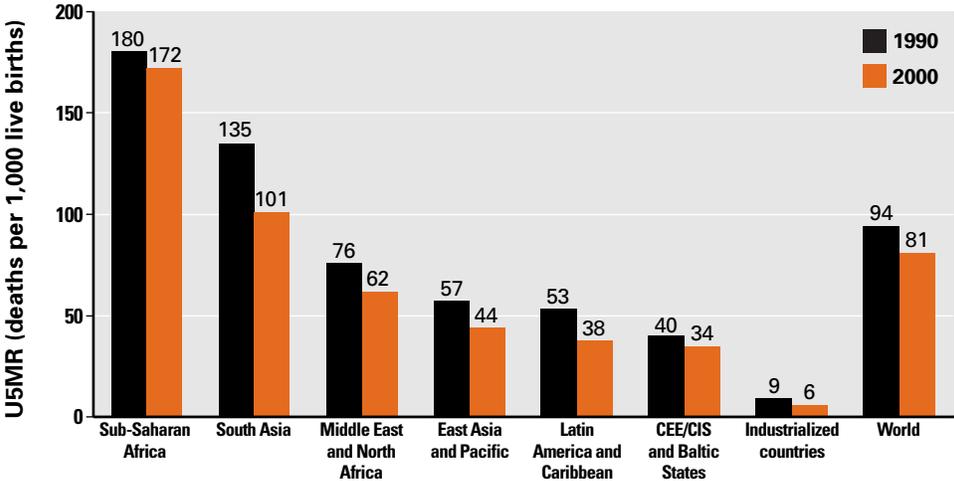
in realizing these rights. Moreover, the Secretary-General has reported periodically to the UN General Assembly on progress towards achieving the Summit goals, including a major mid-decade review in 1996. UNICEF has prepared progress reports on the implementation of Summit goals and disseminated them through its flagship publications, *The Progress of Nations* and *The State of the World’s Children*. In 2000, a wide-ranging, end-decade review process culminated in the preparation of substantive national progress reports by nearly 150 countries, the largest single data collection effort ever for monitoring children’s rights and well-being, information that is presented in the accompanying ‘Statistical Review’.

The breadth and quality of the follow-up response to the Summit have made it possible to objectively assess the decade’s achievements, its setbacks and the lessons learned for the future. The picture that emerges is mixed. Real and significant progress has been made in a number of areas – perhaps much more than is commonly recognized. It is important to remember that the world has seen more gains against poverty and more progress for children in the last 50 years than in the previous 500. But there have also been setbacks, slippage and, on some fronts, real regression. On

balance there has been net progress, laying a good foundation for completing the unfinished business of the World Summit and tackling new challenges.

Real progress for children

Some 63 countries, for example, achieved the Summit goal of reducing by one third the death rate of children under five, while over 100 countries cut such deaths by one fifth. Consequently, there are now 3 million fewer under-five deaths each year than at the beginning of the 1990s; one third of these young lives are saved just by achieving the Summit goal of reducing child deaths from diarrhoeal disease by 50 per cent.



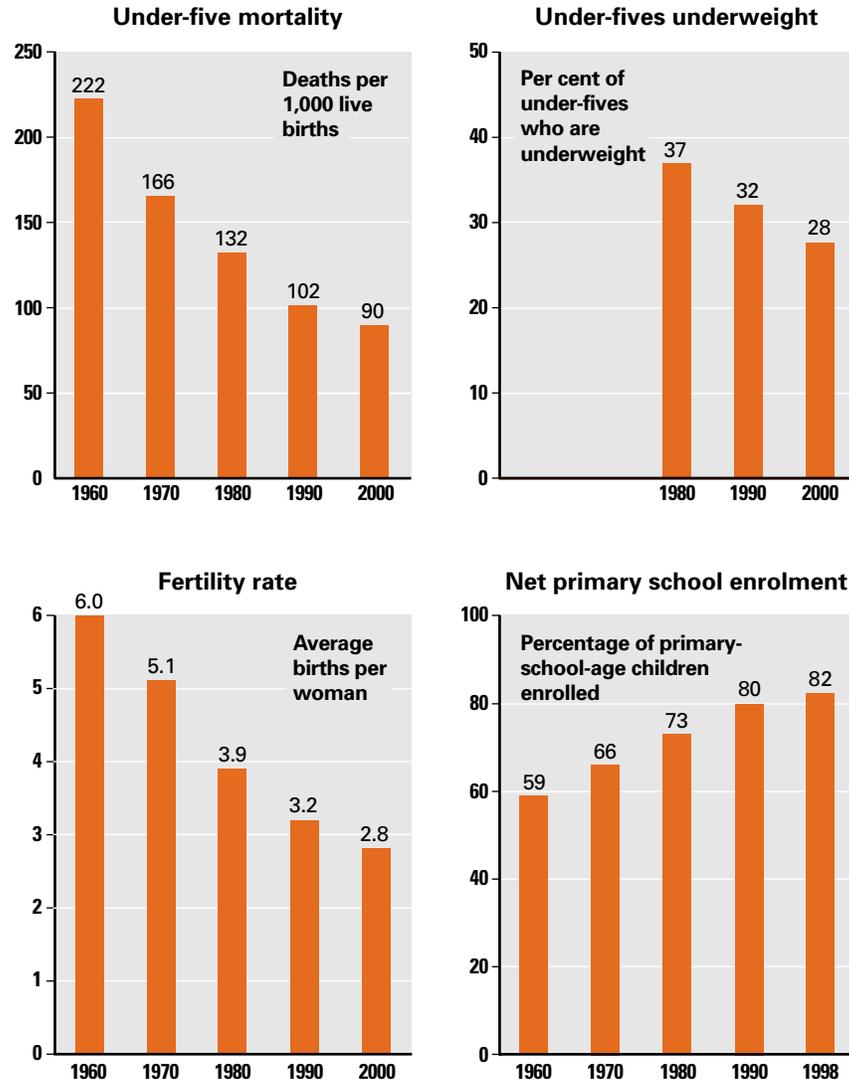
Source: UNICEF, 2000.

Under-five mortality rate, change over period 1990-2000

The high levels of child immunization reached in the late 1980s in most regions of the world have been sustained. A global immunization partnership of governments, UN agencies, NGOs and diverse elements of civil society has brought polio to the brink of eradication – the number of reported polio cases in the world is now 88 per cent lower than a decade ago. National immunization campaigns in developing countries have made it possible to provide vitamin A supplements on a mass scale, reducing child deaths as well as cases of irreversible blindness. After decades of precipitous decline, the life-sustaining practice of breastfeeding increased in the 1990s. Because 1.5 billion additional people now have access to iodized salt, there has been dramatic progress in preventing iodine deficiency disorders, the world’s major cause of preventable mental retardation, against which an estimated 90 million newborns are now protected every year. And worldwide, there are more children in school than ever before.

Thanks to the far greater awareness of child rights spurred by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, egregious violations are being systematically exposed and actions taken to combat them. NGOs and the media are increasingly active in drawing public attention to special protection issues, such as hazardous and exploitative child labour, the trafficking and sexual abuse and exploitation of children, the impact of armed conflict on children, and other forms of violence, much of it gender based.

Progress in developing countries



Sources: UNICEF, ACC/SCN, UN Population Division and UNESCO, 1998 and 2000.

Issues relevant to children are also higher on national and global political agendas. Planning for children has spurred the mainstreaming of children's concerns into public policies and budgets. Numerous national constitutions now include explicit provisions on children. National and local election campaigns are often dominated by child-related issues. Decentralized plans for children have often helped bring development administration closer to communities. At the UN, the General Assembly has addressed children's issues, and the Security Council has formally acknowledged the centrality of the rights and well-being of children and women in the pursuit of international peace and security.

Unfulfilled commitments

But for all the millions of young lives that have been saved or enhanced, many of the survival and development goals set by the World Summit remain unfulfilled. Nearly 11 million children still die each year before their fifth birthday, often from

readily preventable causes. An estimated 150 million children are malnourished. Nearly 120 million are still out of school, 53 per cent of them girls. This unconscionable scale of human suffering dwarfs the achievements of the past decade – and makes more urgent the need for significant progress.

Unfortunately, the obstacles to achieving the promises of the Summit have become even more daunting than they were in 1990. The Summit was held at the end of the cold war, amid high expectations that resources hitherto allocated for military expenditure would be channelled into development. The peace dividend has not materialized, and the 1990s in fact were marked by an unprecedented explosion of ethnic conflict and civil war.

In addition, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has reached catastrophic proportions in several parts of the world, unravelling decades of hard-won gains in child survival and development, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. The disease is leaving millions of children orphaned even as it kills teachers, health workers and other professionals who maintain and operate the vital infrastructure of society.

And chronic poverty remains the greatest obstacle to fulfilling the rights of children. Half of humanity remains desperately impoverished, with 3 billion people subsisting on less than \$2 a day, and 1.2 billion – half of them children – suffering absolute poverty, struggling to survive on less than \$1 a day. At a time of unprecedented global prosperity, the persistence of such mass poverty is inexcusable. Humanity has more resources at its disposal than ever before – material, technological and intellectual. Yet the gulf between rich and poor continues to widen. Between 1960 and 1995, the disparity in per capita income between industrialized and developing countries more than tripled.

Nevertheless, even in the face of such formidable obstacles, there are grounds for cautious optimism. For several reasons, this is an opportune moment for reaching the remaining Summit goals – and for mobilizing a global alliance that achieves a breakthrough in human development based on actions for children.

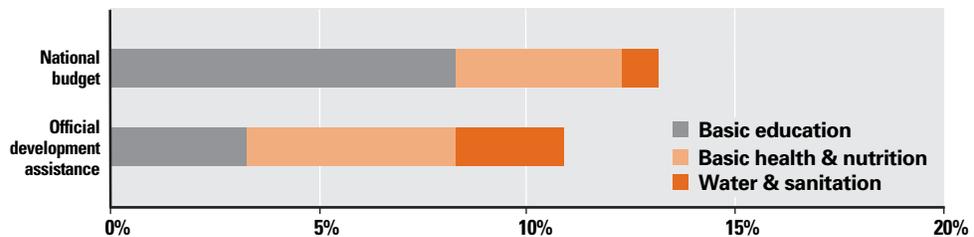
A future of promises kept

The experience of the 1990s in pursuing the World Summit goals and putting into practice the Convention on the Rights of the Child has generated many lessons. We now know so much more about what must be done to guarantee the rights and well-being of children. We know that a significant leap in human development is possible if we ensure that every child gets the best possible start in the early years; if we guarantee that every child receives a high-quality basic education; and if we give adolescents every opportunity to develop their capacities and participate meaningfully in society.

We also know that the world has fallen short of achieving most of the goals of the World Summit for Children, not because they were too ambitious or unaffordable, nor because they were technically beyond reach. We have fallen short largely because the needed investments for children were not made. With limited support, even the poorest countries can afford to underwrite basic social services. But with few exceptions, developing countries devoted only about 12 per cent to 14 per cent of their national budgets to basic social services throughout the 1990s, while donors allocated

only 10 per cent to 11 per cent of their aid budgets, which were already at a record low. These amounts fell far short of the minimum needed to meet the most pressing needs of children in primary health care, nutrition, basic education, safe water and adequate sanitation. The 20/20 Initiative, endorsed at the World Summit for Social Development in 1995, estimates that an average of 20 per cent of the national budget in developing countries and 20 per cent of donors' aid budgets, if spent efficiently on basic social services, would enable everyone to have access to them.

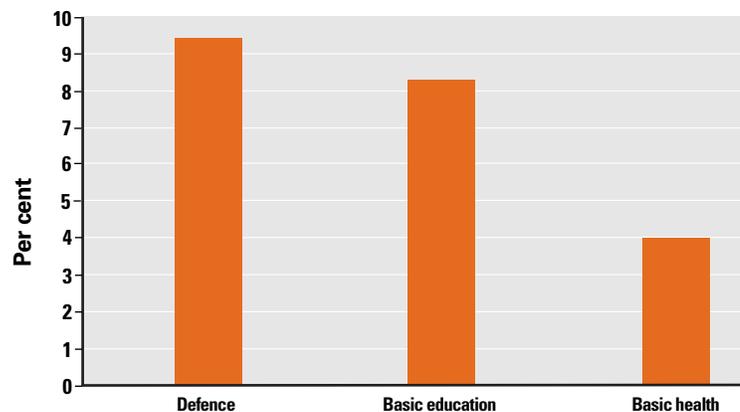
Under-investment in basic social services



Sources: OECD, *Development Co-operation 2000 Report*, and UNICEF/UNDP, 1998.

Compared to what the world spends on armaments or luxury consumer items, the resources needed to provide for the basic needs of children are modest. The cost of realizing universal access to health, education and water and sanitation was estimated by the United Nations and the World Bank to be, in 1995 prices, an additional \$70 billion to \$80 billion per year – easily affordable. But developing countries spent, on average, more on defence than on either basic education or basic health care. Industrialized countries spent about 10 times more on defence than on international development assistance.

Percentage of national budget spent on defence, basic education and basic health in developing countries



Source: UNICEF and UNDP, 1998.

Thus, the key constraint is generally not an insuperable shortfall of resources but a combination of misplaced priorities, absence of vision and insufficient commitment by leaders. This is why the General Assembly's Special Session on Children must inspire the vision, commitment and leadership needed to secure a better future for every child. We must join in a global movement to build a world fit for children.

This report shows that a future of promises kept and potential realized is within close reach. To secure this future, leaders at every level of government and civil society must exert the political will necessary to bring about a decisive shift in

national priorities – to make investment in the well-being of children the overarching and unassailable goal. The Special Session on Children must be the juncture at which this great step is taken.

Children in the 1990s – the global context

The last decade of the twentieth century was both the best and the worst of times for the world's children. A global economic boom, new political freedoms and rapid technological breakthroughs held out great promise for the future of the young. But ills deadly to their well-being persisted and even intensified: mass poverty, ruinous diseases, unpunished violence and increasingly obscene disparities in wealth and opportunity.

Thus, each positive development in the 1990s was accompanied by a new or worsening problem:

- + Unprecedented global prosperity and unparalleled access to information
- but persistent poverty and widening disparities both between rich and poor countries and within them.
- + Following the World Summit for Children, stronger international partnerships and successful action to cut major childhood diseases
- but unimaginable devastation by HIV/AIDS, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.
- + Some gains for women, including greater legal recognition of their rights in many countries
- but continuing gender inequity and gender discrimination.
- + Increasing recognition of children's rights and attention to violations of these rights
- but proliferating armed conflicts that disproportionately killed and injured children, the persistence of other forms of violence against children and continued widespread exploitation of their bodies and labour.
- + Some progress in reducing the burden of debt crippling poor countries, freeing some resources for investment in children
- but a severe decline in international development assistance and inattention to basic services in both aid and public spending.
- + New opportunities for popular participation created by the spread of democratic governance and increased decentralization, and a greater role in development for civil society, NGOs and the private sector
- but continued poor environmental management, placing ever greater numbers of children at risk of disease and natural disasters.

Global prosperity – but the poor left behind

The 1990s witnessed a spectacular expansion of the world economy as the technological innovations and dismantling of trade barriers known as 'globalization' gathered strength. But the massive benefits and opportunities generated by globalization

accrued, for the most part, to wealthy countries – or to already well-off people in a small number of developing countries. The gulf between rich and poor countries widened. In 1990 the annual income per person in high-income countries was 56 times greater than in low-income countries; in 1999 it was 63 times greater.

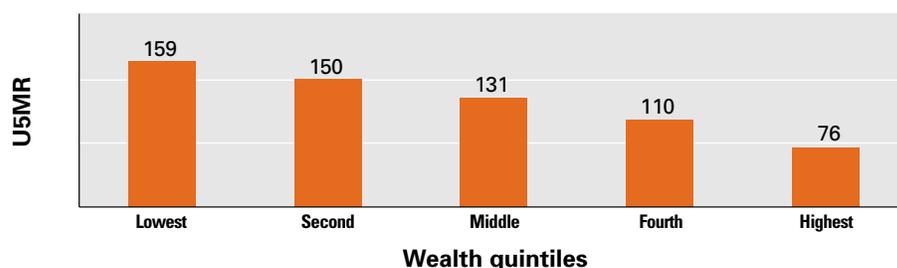
During the 1990s, average incomes rose in Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa. East Asia's economy grew rapidly until the financial crisis of 1997-1998; some countries of the region have recovered quickly from the downturn. In several South Asian nations, growth was too modest – and political conditions too unsettled – for substantial reductions in poverty; in India, worsening inequality offset the opportunities offered by rapid economic growth. In the States of Central Asia and Eastern Europe that were once part of the Soviet bloc, the decade witnessed the wrenching transition from central planning to a market-oriented economy: unemployment and social dislocation increased, while social spending and safety-net provisions fell sharply. Sub-Saharan Africa was left virtually unaided by globalization: Very few countries experienced any rise in income per person; more often, already minimal incomes shrank.

What is more, despite increasing international concern about poverty, the number of people in developing countries struggling to survive on less than \$1 a day – the international measure of absolute poverty – rose during the 1990s by an average of about 10 million each year. Today, despite a \$30 trillion global economy, some 40 per cent of children in developing countries – about 600 million – must attempt to survive on less than \$1 a day. Even in the world's richest countries, one in every six children lives below the national poverty line.

The failure to reduce poverty at a time of unprecedented economic growth has most severely affected the world's children. Children are hardest hit by poverty because it strikes at the very roots of their potential for development – their growing minds and bodies. There are stages in life when children are capable of growing by leaps and bounds – physically, intellectually and emotionally. They are also particularly vulnerable at these stages to risks that lead to stunted growth, failed learning, trauma or death. If a child's cycle of growth and development is interrupted by poverty, this often becomes a lifelong handicap.

Poverty can also deprive a child of life altogether, a bitter fact reflected in the large disparities in child mortality between social groups in most countries. On average, a child from the poorest 20 per cent of the population is at least twice as likely to die before the age of five as a child from the richest 20 per cent. Poor families compensate for this high child death rate through higher fertility rates, which means that for every child's death in a rich family there are at least three deaths in a poor one.

U5MR disparity by asset quintile



Source: UNICEF, weighted average of 43 countries, based on Demographic and Health Surveys data, mid-1990s.

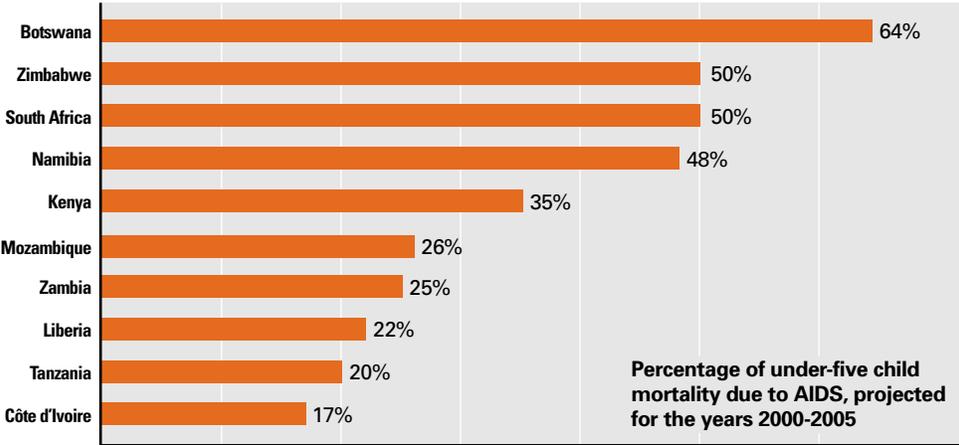
These are shameful statistics for a world possessing such extraordinary wealth, knowledge and technological capacity. These statistics and the failures of the past decade prove that globalization is not a solution in itself – that creating larger and freer markets will create opportunities for many but will not solve the fundamental problems of most of the families still trapped in poverty. At least as much energy as has been devoted to opening up markets must be poured into strengthening the social institutions, programmes and standards that will protect and liberate the poor – most particularly, children in poverty.

Progress on childhood disease – but devastation by HIV/AIDS

At the heart of the World Summit for Children’s Plan of Action was the concern to improve child survival and control the major childhood diseases. And through international partnerships, mass immunization campaigns and community-focused initiatives, the control of childhood diseases has been one of the most remarkable developments of the past decade.

Yet, many of the unprecedented achievements in social and human development of the last half of the 20th century – gains painstakingly pursued step by step – are increasingly at risk because of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In large parts of sub-Saharan Africa these gains have already been undone. Many societies and families in Asia, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe and elsewhere are also now under serious threat.

By the end of 2000, HIV/AIDS had claimed nearly 22 million lives. Life expectancy has fallen by between 18 and 23 years in the worst-affected countries. Infant and child mortality rates have soared. Health services have been overwhelmed. The deaths of many teachers have enfeebled schools that were often already struggling to provide a decent education – and students have been forced to drop out to care for AIDS-affected relatives.



AIDS and child mortality

Source: UN Population Division, 1999.

The impact on children is seen most devastatingly in the soaring numbers of AIDS orphans. By the year 2000, an estimated 13 million children had lost their mother or both parents to AIDS; 95 per cent of these children are in sub-Saharan Africa. Facing social stigma and isolation and bereft of basic care and financial

resources, AIDS orphans are less likely to be immunized, more likely to be malnourished, less likely to go to school and more vulnerable to exploitation.

The social profile of the AIDS pandemic has been gradually changing. The disease is now increasingly affecting the young, girls and women, and people who are illiterate and poor. In most countries, adolescent girls are now overrepresented among the newly infected.

A few countries openly confronted the pandemic in the 1990s and took energetic steps to combat it. They have seen encouraging results. But elsewhere, public-awareness efforts, school-based education and prevention initiatives have been delayed for years. Children and young adults are among the main victims of this neglect. Decisive action must be taken now to prevent further increases in those parts of the world that still have relatively low rates of HIV/AIDS. At the UN Millennium Summit in

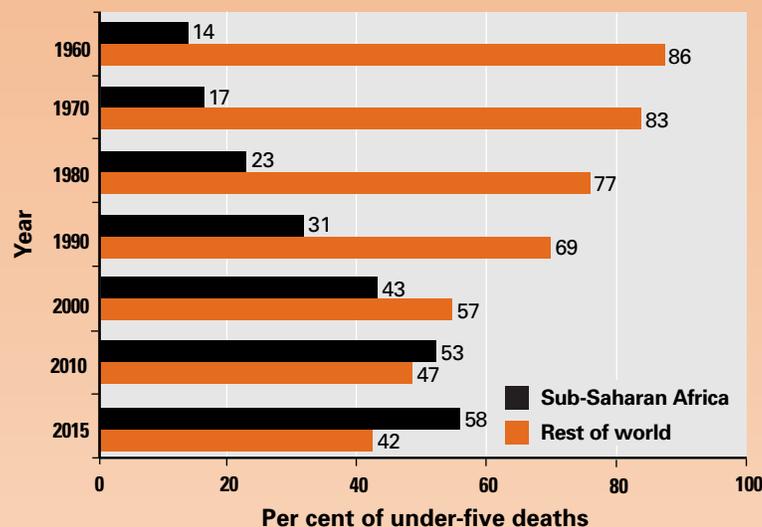
AFRICA'S CHILDREN, EVERYONE'S FUTURE

Ten years ago, it was the children of Africa, of sub-Saharan Africa in particular, whose needs were most acute, and yet it is here that the least progress has been made. Sub-Saharan Africa is still the region with the highest child death rates – 17 per cent of children do not survive to the age of five – and contains 9 of the 14 countries where child mortality has actually increased.

Over the last 30 years, sub-Saharan Africa has seen its share of the world's child deaths grow exponentially – from 14 per cent in 1960 to 43 per cent in 2000. If current trends persist, it will account for 58 per cent of the world's child deaths by 2015. Clearly, achieving the Millennium Declaration goal of sharply lowering global under-five mortality within the next 15 years hinges on progress in Africa.

Under-five deaths in sub-Saharan Africa as a percentage of global under-five deaths

(Projections based on trends in the 1990s)



Source: UNICEF, 2001.

Sub-Saharan Africa is the epicentre of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It has just 10 per cent of the world's population but 70 per cent of the world's people with HIV/AIDS, 80 per cent of AIDS deaths and 90 per cent of AIDS orphans. In stark contrast to children everywhere else, today's southern African children are likely to live shorter lives than their grandparents.

October 2000, seriously affected countries were urged to have a national plan of action against HIV/AIDS in place within a year. That deadline is fast approaching.

Some gains for women – but persistent discrimination

The need for development to address disparities and discrimination based on gender was a central theme of the international conferences of the 1990s. There was growing understanding of the complementarity between women's rights and children's rights. Women's rights to equality and freedom from discrimination have been increasingly recognized, and many governments have passed laws in line with international standards and set up mechanisms to promote gender equality. In addition, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted in 1979,

Immunization coverage in sub-Saharan Africa has decreased overall in the decade since the World Summit for Children. Less than half of the region's children under one are fully immunized against diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus. Despite progress in a few countries, the number of malnourished children has climbed, and over 3 million newborns each year are of low birthweight. While modest gains have been made in expanding access to improved water sources, families in sub-Saharan Africa still have the world's poorest access to safe drinking water. Only slightly more than half have access to sanitation, and the weakness of public health systems has led to the resurgence of major child-killers, such as malaria and cholera.

Maternal mortality is highest in sub-Saharan Africa, where women face a 1-in-13 lifetime risk of dying during pregnancy and childbirth. Persisting gender discrimination, poverty and lack of investment in essential obstetric services fuel this toll.

Net primary school enrolment in sub-Saharan Africa rose from 50 per cent in 1990 to 60 per cent in 1999; however, this is still lower than any other region. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for over one third of the world's children out of school, who are vulnerable – increasingly, it seems – to every kind of exploitation and abuse. And, overall, no progress has been made in closing the gender gap in education.

There are some notable successes in Africa. Salt iodization and efforts to tackle polio and guinea worm disease have benefited from strong political leadership. The gradual spread of democracy, decentralization and information technology has encouraged broader participation in development and the emergence of an increasingly vibrant civil society. Reforms of health and education systems in countries like Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali and Zambia, and initiatives to expand access to primary education in Malawi and Uganda, promise to improve health care and learning. Determined efforts to overcome the legacy of apartheid in Namibia and South Africa and to reconstruct infrastructure and basic services in Mozambique have captured the world's attention. Following the lead of Senegal and Uganda, several countries have launched major efforts to control HIV/AIDS.

There is hope for Africa's children, and the world must respond to the call of the Millennium Declaration by making a 'first call' for them. This entails reversing the decline in official development assistance (ODA), focusing ODA on basic social services, opening industrialized country markets to Africa's goods and ensuring substantive debt relief. As the Millennium Report notes, nowhere is a global commitment to poverty reduction needed more than in Africa south of the Sahara, because no region of the world endures greater human suffering. Of course, there must be a clear lead from the continent itself – to take further the necessary reforms and make governments accountable, to tackle disparities, to wage war on malaria and HIV/AIDS, to secure gender equity, to make armed conflict a thing of the past and to invest resources and energy in fulfilling the rights of Africa's children, who are our future.

has become the second most ratified international convention, albeit with a high number of reservations by governments. There are more women in the labour force than in 1990 – and also more girls in school, with the gender gap in schooling sharply reduced over the decade, particularly in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia.

But, in general, less headway was made on gender equality than in most other areas of social development. Discrimination remains rife. Women in formal employment, for example, are still consistently paid lower wages than their male counterparts, receive little support for child care and have much less access to productive resources. Women have also borne a disproportionate share of the costs of the economic crises and shocks of the 1990s, particularly where social safety nets were weak or missing altogether.

The number of women who die in childbirth remains unacceptably high in the poorest parts of the world; the maternal death rate has not been significantly reduced over the decade, let alone slashed in half as the World Summit demanded. This failure reflects both a lack of investment and women's continuing low status in many societies, shown in the high rates of female malnutrition, illness and HIV/AIDS.

Gender-based violence is still a daily occurrence. Among its many abhorrent manifestations are sex-selective abortion and female infanticide, which emerge from the preference for sons in some cultures; female genital mutilation; so-called 'honour' killings; domestic violence and abuse; sexual slavery, prostitution and trafficking; and the use of rape as a weapon of war.

Almost all societies are still marked by significant discrimination against women, which often remains enshrined in national legislation or in customary practice – typically in conjunction with discrimination against children. Gender-based discrimination may also be compounded by other forms of discrimination, including ethnicity, religion, language, HIV status, citizenship status or physical ability.

New awareness of child rights – but exploitation and violence remain

The concept of child rights was new to most at the start of the 1990s. But the UN General Assembly's unanimous acceptance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 has had an extraordinary impact. A new awareness of children's rights has blossomed all over the world. All but two countries have ratified the Convention. Many national constitutions have added specific provisions on children. Children's issues are now on the political agenda and much more likely to be featured in national election campaigns or in international meetings. Social investment and education programmes to meet children's rights to survival and development have moved up the policy ladder. The media are increasingly active in drawing public attention to the exploitation and abuse of children.

The idea of child rights, then, may be a beacon guiding the way to the future – but it is also illuminating how many adults neglect their responsibilities towards children and how children are too often the victims of the ugliest and most shameful human activities.

No child can realize his or her potential in the midst of war. Yet entire generations are still growing up surrounded by armed conflict and insecurity – fanned in many cases by those who profit from ethnic tension. Conflicts killed more than 2 million children in the 1990s and left many millions disabled and psychologically scarred. The consequences of conflict – displacement, insecurity and lack of access to children in need, as well as the destruction of social infrastructure and judicial systems – created huge and frequently insurmountable obstacles to the achievement of the goals set at the World Summit. At the end of the decade, 35 million people were either refugees or internally displaced, of whom about 80 per cent were children and women.

More than 10,000 children are killed or maimed by landmines every year, and children in at least 68 countries live with the daily fear of these weapons. Trade in arms and illicit drugs – worth, respectively, an estimated \$800 billion and \$400 billion annually – has flourished in the last decade, contributing to the proliferation of conflicts and violence. The development of light, inexpensive weapons has made it still easier to use children as soldiers and to exploit them in the trafficking of arms and drugs. Graça Machel's ground-breaking report, 'Impact of Armed Conflict on Children', which was submitted to the General Assembly in 1996, assesses the multiple ways in which children's rights are violated by armed conflict.

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Yet conflict-ridden nations are in one sense the tip of the iceberg: In every part of the world children suffer abuse, neglect and exploitation to an extent that was not recognized until recently. Sexual abuse, for example, is a problem that has been kept hidden in all societies and is only now being brought to light, not least because the testimonies of children are at last being taken more seriously. Such abuse also takes place for commercial gain, and the trafficking of children for sexual exploitation has reached alarming levels. Commercial prostitution and child slavery are often concealed as household domestic work. An estimated 30 million children are now victimized by traffickers, so far largely with impunity.

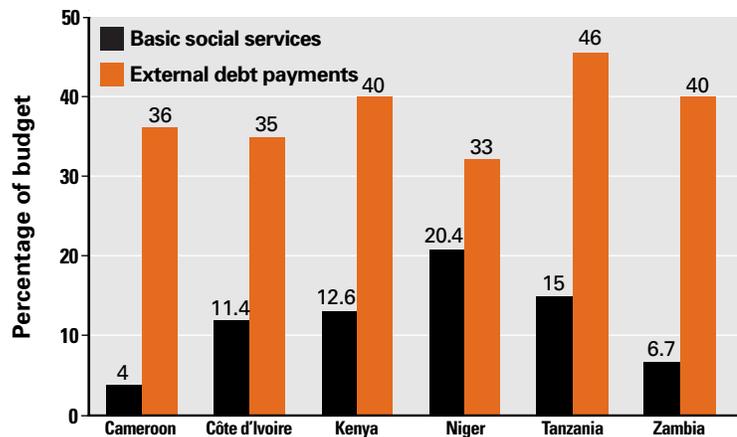
Accidents, violence and suicide are the leading causes of death among adolescents. These are frequently related to alcohol and drug abuse, which often stem from alienation, social exclusion and the breakdown of families, as well as the inadequacy of social protection mechanisms. These trends are part of wider violations that enslave and crush young lives – including the dealing in and selling of illegal and dangerous narcotics and the promotion of tobacco use.

Some 250 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 work, and the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 50 million to 60 million of them are engaged in intolerable forms of labour. These children, who labour in homes, plantations and factories, are likely to be deprived of contact with their family, to go unregistered at birth, to forgo education and to live on the streets.

Debt relief accelerates – but aid diminishes

It has been clear for many years that the enormous debt burden borne by developing countries is a major obstacle to human development – especially to investment in children’s well-being. Low-income countries often spend more – in some cases three to five times more – on external debt servicing than on basic social services. By the end of the 1990s, the 41 heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) owed about \$205 billion in external debt, totalling about 130 per cent of their combined gross national product (GNP). In part because of this heavy debt-servicing, most of these countries under-invested in basic social services, making it impossible to reach many of the goals for children set for 2000. Village clinics were left without medicines, students without books or chairs, water pumps went unrepaired and teachers were paid too little to support their own families.

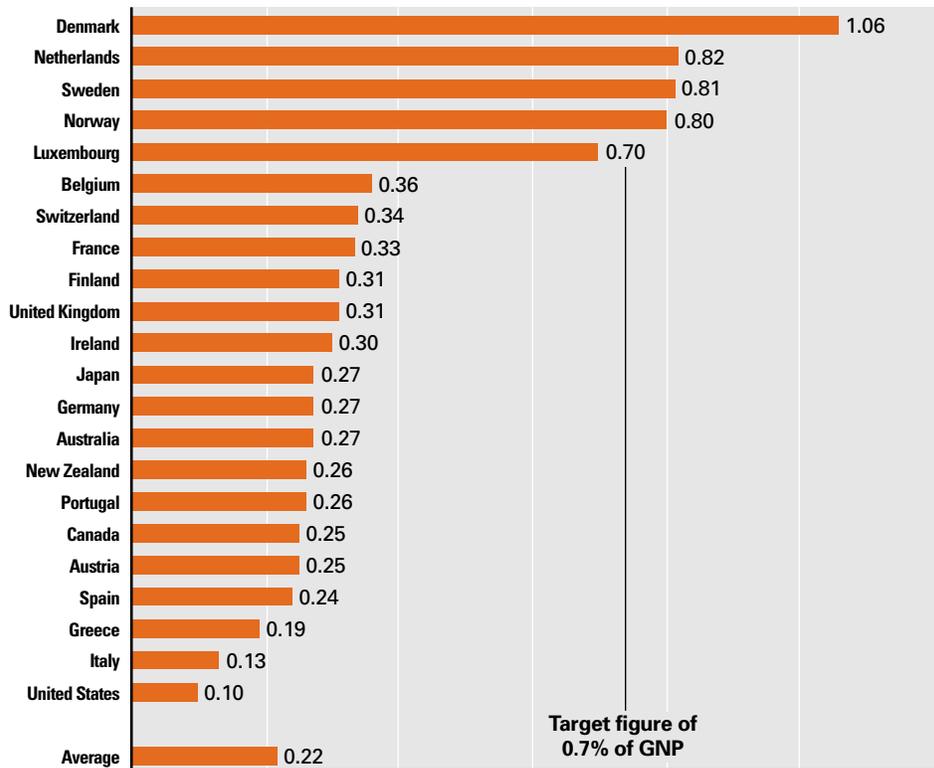
Debt and basic social services as percentage of budget



Source: UNICEF and UNDP, 1998.

Throughout the 1990s, pressure from indebted countries and worldwide campaigns by civil society organizations helped ameliorate the attitude of industrialized countries and international financial institutions towards debt relief. The HIPC initiative was launched in 1996 as the first comprehensive approach to reducing the external debt of the world’s poorest nations. By December 2000, 22 countries had become eligible for debt relief, with a commitment on the part of their creditors of \$33.6 billion. It is expected that – when combined with traditional debt rescheduling and further bilateral debt ‘forgiveness’ – their external debt-service payments will be reduced by one third in the next few years. Uganda, which has increased spending on its primary schools, has shown how debt relief can bring immediate benefits for children, underscoring the need to broaden and accelerate the debt relief process.

If the possibility of debt relief for some of the world’s poorest countries is the good news, the bad news is that international aid dwindled in the 1990s, sinking to a record low in 1997 of 0.22 per cent of the total GNP of developed countries – less than a third of the 0.7 per cent target agreed by the UN General Assembly some 30 years ago. After a minor increase in 1998 and 1999, international aid fell back in 2000 to the 1997 low. Only four donor countries consistently achieved throughout the 1990s the target of providing 0.7 per cent of GNP for international aid: Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. Most G-7 members markedly lowered the volume of their aid effort over the decade.



Official
development
assistance as a
percentage of
donor nation
GNP, 2000

Source: OECD press release, 20 April 2001.

Moreover, the share of aid allocated to education and health programmes – important for reaching many of the goals and targets for children – barely improved over the decade. The proportion spent on basic social services remained extremely low. Given the international consensus on the benefits of ‘investing in children’, this was a baffling failure.

Nor, despite the heightened international concern about ‘poverty reduction’, was there notable targeting of aid to the countries that most needed assistance. On the contrary, between 1992 and 1997 the decline in aid was sharpest for the poorest countries, which have the highest rates of child mortality and the weakest basic services. Without a revival in official aid flows, targeted to countries that need aid most, even the recent headway in reducing debt will come to naught.

Democratic governance spreads – but care of environment wanes

The responsibility of investing in children resides, of course, as much with the governments of developing countries as with those of industrialized countries. Their burden of debt does not exempt developing-country governments from the need to give highest priority to the investments in basic services that benefit children – and to ensure that the impact of even these low allocations is not further weakened by inefficiency and waste.

In a number of countries the quality and responsiveness of government improved over the decade as progress was made towards political democratization. The new Government of South Africa was able to begin healing some of apartheid’s scars. Eritrea and Namibia achieved independence and so, prospectively, has East

Timor. Many other countries implemented political reforms and held multiparty elections. The number of formal electoral democracies increased from 76 in 1990 to 120 in 2000; about two thirds of the world's people now live in electoral democracies.

Aiming to bring government closer to the people, many countries also initiated programmes of decentralization and made efforts to empower their local authorities. This has created opportunities and begun to pay dividends in at least some places, often where bold local leaders have emerged. In such places, greater community participation, more transparent decision-making and clearer procedures for accountability are enabling local governments and municipalities to serve people more effectively. In many countries, local authorities have developed plans and adopted targets specifically reflecting their responsibilities to children. The challenge now is to back these new commitments with adequate financial and human resources.

PRIVATE SECTOR ACTION FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Private and civil society involvement during the 1990s in the struggle for children's rights and development is exemplified at the national level in the contributions of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and the Grameen Bank to securing basic education, women's progress and family livelihoods in Bangladesh. It is evident regionally in the work of the Aga Khan Foundation in pre-school education and capacity-building in some of the poorest parts of the world. And it is evident globally in the role that Rotary International has played in the world campaign against polio, the Kiwanis service clubs against iodine deficiency disorders, and the Lions Club International and Merck & Co. in the fight against river blindness; in the involvement of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Associations and the Rockefeller Foundation in the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI); and in Ted Turner's support for the United Nations in its fight against poverty and for human rights.

This year's Special Session on Children has advanced this mobilization. UNICEF, in alliance with BRAC, Netaid.org Foundation, PLAN International, Save the Children and World Vision, has launched a Global Movement for Children, joined rapidly by thousands of other organizations around the world. A rallying call of the Movement is the 'Say Yes for Children' campaign, which calls for accountability and action by leaders at every level of society – public and private, adults and young people alike – to change the world *for* children and *with* children. It seeks to attract new groups to the cause of children's rights, including trade unions and political and women's organizations. Business leaders and private sector groups will also be engaged so as to promote practices that are consistently child- and family-friendly.

This report reflects, in all its chapters, the key role that NGOs and other civil society actors have played in advocacy, awareness-raising and programme implementation; in monitoring and supporting the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; in participating in national, regional and global end-decade reviews; and in preparing for the General Assembly's Special Session on Children. At both national and international levels, civil society actors have proved their effectiveness as advocates for children, both tracking children's progress and monitoring violations of their rights. Some have encouraged and nurtured new networks of community groups that work locally for children. International NGOs have complemented the development efforts of governments and civil society and have supported the growing involvement of national and

local organizations in debating economic policy and in acting for reducing poverty. Several corporations have also responded to the call of the World Summit for Children, including those participating in the UN Secretary-General's 'Global Compact'. However, if the community of nations is to make good on its decade-old promise to give every child a better future, governments, multinational organizations and civil society, including the private sector, must join in this common cause as never before.

But if the decade showed the increasing willingness of governments, international organizations, civil society and the business community to work together towards common aims, it also showed that such shared commitment is not yet being applied with sufficient seriousness and urgency to the stewardship of our global environment. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in 1992, renewed awareness of environmental trends and dangers, especially through the concept of a 'global commons', underscoring the special threats to children, adolescents and pregnant women from environmental contamination and pollution.

Yet environmental degradation has continued over the decade with few governments showing real commitment to addressing its root causes and managing its effects.

The degradation has been stoked by the rapid growth of cities coupled with poor management of urbanization, unregulated industrialization, wasteful patterns of consumption, the neglect of urban poverty and the effects of population displacement. The health and lives of many millions of children are under daily threat as a result of broken, neglected or non-existent systems for safe water provision and sewage disposal, poor-quality air in overcrowded slums, the dumping of industrial and chemical wastes, industrial and traffic hazards, and precarious dwellings in areas prone to earthquakes and flooding. Meanwhile, the threat of global warming has become the definitive test of the world's commitment to preserving the planet for its children.

As was recognized at the Millennium Summit, children have the greatest stake in the success of today's leaders in meeting the grave challenges of environmental protection. On this success rests, to a considerable degree, the survival and health of the world's children.

“There is no cause which merits a higher priority than the protection and development of children, on whom the survival, stability and advancement of all nations – and, indeed, of human civilization – depends.”

*– Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children,
30 September 1990*