



In a single generation

The principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child provide the world with a vision of what the 21st century could bring – children and adolescents living in stable and nurturing homes and communities where, with adult guidance and protection, they have ample opportunities to develop the fulness of their strengths and talents and where their human rights are respected.

With this guiding vision, much can be done to break the intergenerational patterns of poverty, war, HIV/AIDS and discrimination that are robbing children of their rights and stripping countries of their progress. Significant work continues to be done within and across nations: The global efforts of UNAIDS, for instance, to prevent the transmission of HIV at the same time as it works towards mitigating the consequences of this apocalyptic pandemic. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has taken particular care in addressing the rights and needs of refugee children and adolescents as it leads the coordinated response to emergencies, with partners such as UNICEF and the World Food Programme. And in the last half of this decade, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank worked together, as they have since 1944, to contain the Asian financial crisis, to assist the Russian Federation in its economic transitions and to reduce the debts carried by the majority of the poor countries in the world.

Success will depend as it always has on political commitment and additional

resources at all levels. And success will also depend on the visionary leaders who will meet in 2001, ready to move forward with urgency and passion, determined to make lives better for children within the next generation.

Poverty does *not* always have to be with us

The patterns of poverty that are passed from one generation to the next can and will be broken when the poor have the means and opportunity to be healthy and well-nourished enough, and educated and skilled enough, to fully participate in the decisions that affect their lives. Because such needs are most efficiently met through public services, universal access to an integrated set of basic social services is one of the most effective ways of reducing poverty in any society. Access to basic health, education, family planning and water and sanitation services is what makes sustained and stable economic progress possible, helps people achieve greater productivity and forms an especially crucial buffer for children and women in difficult times.

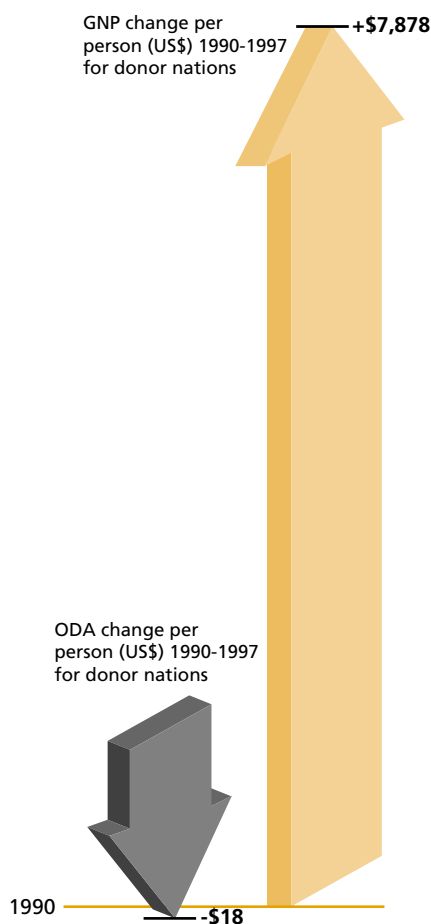
The services, in light of their great benefits and certainly in comparison with most weapons of destruction, are modestly priced. By redirecting \$70 billion to \$80 billion a year in a global economy that is more than \$30 trillion, the world could ensure access to the basics for everyone. The 20/20 Initiative is one way to do it.

An idea championed by then UNICEF Executive Director, James P. Grant, 20/20

A mother talks to her baby son while they wait at a neighbourhood health clinic in Shanghai (China).

was launched at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo, and pursued the following year at the World Summit for Social Development, convened in Copenhagen. It builds upon the Convention's mutual

Figure 6 Growing wealth and declining ODA



Sources: UNICEF, *The Progress of Nations 1999*; UNDP, *Human Development Report 1999* and *Human Development Report 1993*.

obligations for both rich countries and poor to come up with adequate resources for basic social services for human development. The Initiative suggests as a guiding principle that developing countries commit 20 per cent of their budget and donor countries 20 per cent of their official development assistance (ODA) to build and buttress these services.

ODA, however, has declined alarmingly in recent years, jeopardizing resources and creating strains on development goals. It dropped 21 per cent between 1992 and 1997, and among the leading industrialized countries, it dropped almost 30 per cent in the same time. Given the fact that the GNP in these countries jumped by almost 30 per cent, the retreat from assistance seems particularly egregious.

But governments in the developing world must answer as well for their budget decisions. Of 27 developing countries recently surveyed, only 5 – Belize, Burkina Faso, Namibia, Niger and Uganda – allocate virtually 20 per cent of their budgets to basic social services. Most governments spend only about 13 per cent of their budgets this way, significantly short of what is needed.

It is crucial for people on every continent to speak out against such uninformed priori-

ties and misdirection of resources, as did Archbishop Desmond Tutu, when he criticized South Africa's plan to buy \$5 billion worth of fighter aircraft, corvettes, helicopters and submarines from Canada, France, Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom: "Our country needs teachers and books, clean water and clinics. Billions spent on fighter aircraft should be spent on the upliftment of our people."¹

Of course, some responsibility for the failure to meet fundamental obligations to children needs to be laid at the door of international creditors and those rich nations that have done little to ease the debt burden that drains the national resources of indebted countries. The rights of children throughout the world are not likely to be realized as long as governments remain trapped in debt bondage. In 1996-1997, for example, 4 per cent of Cameroon's central spending went towards basic social services while 36 per cent went towards debt service. In the United Republic of Tanzania, four times more is spent in repaying debt than on primary education, and nine times more than on basic health.

There is a growing international consensus to reduce the crippling external debts of the poorest countries in order to enable those governments to fulfil the rights of their citizens to basic health, nutrition and education services. And heads of the leading industrialized nations took a step in that direction when, at their May 1999 meeting in Cologne (Germany), they agreed to reduce the debts carried by the 41 most heavily indebted poor countries. More recently, IMF has proposed a plan to cancel \$27 billion of the more than \$220 billion owed, freeing that amount for investment in basic social services. Both are promising overtures that are still to be played through.²

Finally, efforts are needed to regulate the powerful forces of globalization without which it will continue to serve the expansion needs of global markets at the expense of

equity between and within nations. As a result, the poor and vulnerable in the world will reap increasingly fewer benefits, leading to their further marginalization and social exclusion.

UNDP's *Human Development Report 1999* calls for stronger governance at the local, national, regional and global levels in order to ensure that globalization works for the benefit of people.³ In keeping with the intent of article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, any attempts to regulate globalization should address the best interests of children through a 'child impact analysis'.⁴ Such an analysis would review any proposals for their impact on children, taking into consideration, for example, whether changes in economic policies protect the rights of children to education and health services or whether changes in labour policies specifically address the issue of child workers.

All wars are wars against children⁵

The UNICEF 1996 Anti-war Agenda stated: "*Children need be the victims of war only if there is no will to prevent it. Experiences in dozens of conflicts confirm that extraordinary actions have been taken and can be taken to protect and provide for children.*"⁶

Since that time a number of significant measures have helped ensure higher visibility and greater protection of children, even as conflicts and atrocities seem to build.⁷ Recommended in 1996 by Graça Machel, expert of the United Nations Secretary-General, a programme of humanitarian mine clearance, mine awareness aimed at women and children, and child-centred rehabilitation has become the standard in conflicts around the world.⁸ There are ongoing international efforts supporting an Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child that would raise the minimum age for children's recruitment into armed forces and participation in armed conflict from 15 to



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Rwandan children line up for water in a refugee camp near the town of Goma.

18 years. In 1997, 123 nations signed the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines, and on Their Destruction. And in 1998, the International Criminal Court, another mechanism for international accountability, was accorded the authority to prosecute as war criminals those conscripting and using children under 18 in hostilities.

The humanitarian tradition of attempting to protect children from the gravest harm in armed conflict has other proud consequences. For nearly two decades, UNICEF has built a peace and security agenda on its belief that children – whether in their homes, in the streets, in their schools or in camps for the displaced – should be respected by all as a 'zone of peace', a concept first advanced to UNICEF by the distinguished Swedish humanitarian, the late Nils Thedin. It is a commitment recently reaffirmed by the United Nations Secretary-General.⁹ Ceasefires have been negotiated for 'days of tranquillity' and 'corridors of peace' to bring food and vaccines to children trapped in wars, including those in Afghanistan, El Salvador, Lebanon, Sudan and Uganda, ground-breaking efforts that saved millions of children from malnutrition and disease. Other heroic efforts have been routinely made in active war zones, including quickly restoring education in order to help children regain some sense of normalcy and security.

Another little-known but promising initiative began in response to the overlapping crises of war and famine that decimated life in southern Sudan for so many years. Linked to Operation Lifeline Sudan, the remarkable effort established a set of humanitarian principles as Ground Rules – new standards by which combatants agreed to protect the rights of children.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was the perfect instrument for the Ground Rules, owing to its constellation of human rights and humanitarian principles, and the fact that nearly 50 per cent of the population in southern Sudan was under the age of 18. Even military commanders who spurned discussions about human rights were willing to talk about the well-being of children. Under the Rules, local communities and military commanders were to be actively engaged in monitoring and addressing the acute problems in child health, education and forced military recruitment that occur during war.

The Ground Rules were signed in 1995 after months of intensive negotiations with all parties, a vital development in a situation like that in Sudan, where 4 million civilians lived in areas under rebel control. UNICEF followed up with an exhaustive campaign carried to the most remote communities, gathering under trees and in thatch huts with elders, health workers and military representatives to disseminate information about the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to train people in human rights and humanitarian principles. The goal was to identify the points in common between prevailing traditional values and international standards prohibiting war crimes and the abuse of children and women. This process revealed the frequent convergence between

the Convention's principles and village traditions.

It will be the work of historians to determine how great and lasting an impact this effort will have but through it, thousands of people learned of rights they did not know they had, and the military significantly shifted its targets away from schools and

other places where children might have been. The idea has set a precedent in introducing the use of international human rights standards by entities other than governments and offers valuable lessons as a prototype for working in other conflict settings.

Because the immediate crises caused by war are dramatic and pressing, they can obscure longer-term needs. Helping children and com-

munities cope with the traumas and tensions that continue after fighting subsides is vital. Post-conflict communities, beset with poverty and high unemployment, must be prepared in advance to receive demobilized soldiers, and programmes for children must include measures such as foster care to prevent children from being dragged off again by armed forces. Girls, who were forced to serve as 'wives' and servants to the combatants, require especially vigilant care to ensure that they are not shunned or driven into further sexual exploitation, prostitution and the risk of HIV/AIDS.

It is also crucial that world leaders, who have been willing to bear the expense of militarization, not shrink from the costs of peace and demobilization. Experience in countries such as Angola, Liberia, Mozambique and Sierra Leone has taught us that without a long-term commitment to the retraining and reintegration of combatants, post-conflict societies risk careening into anarchy and crime.

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Seeds of peace: Young people in Colombia

The rural town of Aguachica Cesar in eastern Colombia has been in the crossfire of conflict between guerrillas, the paramilitaries and the Colombian army in recent years. In 1996, Juan Elias Uribe, then a 14-year-old boy who lived there, became convinced nevertheless that peace was possible and that young people could help bring great changes to his country.

Juan Elias is one of many teenagers in Colombia and thousands around the world who bring the idealism and intense energy of their adolescent years to a cause. Juan Elias's cause was peace. The more he talked publicly about peace in his country, the more certain he became that it could be had.

His father, a dentist and a respected member of the community who often led public health campaigns in poor areas of the town, was proud of his son's peacemaking efforts and let it be known. One morning, Señor Uribe was in his office with his 19-year-old niece, who hoped to become a doctor one day. Three men strode into the dentist's office and barged into the exam rooms. Gunshots rang out and the men exited quickly. Señor Uribe and his niece were found lying in a pool of blood, and both died several hours later.

Murders are common in Aguachica and killers are rarely caught. But this one was different – Señor Uribe was a popular public figure. Community members came forward to identify the killers, who were arrested and jailed for two years but never brought to trial. "They've never told us why they did it," a saddened Juan Elias says of his father's assailants. "Sometimes people in Aguachica don't talk about why things happen."

Beginnings of a movement

Since 1992, the number of political homicides in Colombia has jumped by more than a third, from about 4,400 people in 1992 to more than 6,000 people killed in 1997. Shockingly, the murder of children has also soared: In 1996, 4,322 children were killed, a 40 per cent rise in just two years.

War in Colombia began a half-century ago with *La Violencia*, a brutal struggle between the two main political parties that lasted 16 years and in which 300,000 people lost their lives. Today, half the country is controlled by two guerrilla armies, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National



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Liberation Army (ELN), which have a combined force of about 20,000 combatants. There are also believed to be about 8,000 individuals organized in paramilitary groups under the United Self-Defense Force of Colombia (ACU).

In the last decade alone, the war in Colombia has forced more than 1 million people – about 1 in every 37 Colombians – from their homes. Most of the displaced come from poor rural communities, and a disproportionate number are indigenous or Afro-Colombian. Over 70 per cent of the displaced are women and children who flee to the cities and are then plunged into abject poverty. Children are the main victims of the war and are among the chief perpetrators of violence, as more than 2,000 of them under the age of 15 have been recruited into guerrilla and paramilitary organizations.

Against this grim backdrop, the young people of Colombia decided to do what few dare to do: Work for peace.

In Colombia, two adolescent boys from the Children's Movement for Peace join armed soldiers in a group handshake.

In 1996, Graça Machel, an expert appointed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, completed a global study on the 'Impact of Armed Conflict on Children'. Her investigation took her to Colombia, where she visited Apartadó, a town in the heart of the war-torn Uraba region where guerrillas had been fighting for more than 30 years. Farliz Calle, the 17-year-old daughter of a banana plantation worker, was president of the student council at the local high school and remembers the visit. "For the first time," recounts Farliz, gesturing animatedly to emphasize her message, "the authorities asked children to think in a constructive way about what was happening to us, about the violence and what we wanted to do about it."

The young people of Uraba had a lot to say: 5,000 of them, from more than a dozen townships in the area, wrote stories, poems and letters, painted pictures and constructed sculptures to create a grand exhibition for Ms. Machel. The student council also drew up a Declaration for the Children of Apartadó, which Farliz pre-

sented to Ms. Machel. The Declaration asserted, "We ask the warring factions for peace in our homes, for them not to make orphans of children, to allow us to play freely in the streets and for no harm to come to our small brothers and sisters..." Farliz and the other children demanded a right to play a more active role in solving problems in the community "so that our children do not suffer as we have."

The story might have ended there, but the students pressed their case. Embracing the Colombian Constitution, which had been rewritten in 1991 with guarantees for citizens to participate in their democracy, the students claimed a right to form a 'local government of children'. With the blessing of her embattled municipality, Farliz was elected the first 'child mayor' of Apartadó. This experience was to change her forever.

"To have peace you need to solve poverty, and children cannot do that," says Farliz, bubbling with energy and enthusiasm, "but we found other things." The group named themselves the Children's Movement for Peace in Apartadó, and they began organizing 'peace carnivals' for children from poor communities. They felt that finding ways for children to have fun was itself a way of making peace.

After Ms. Machel's visit, UNICEF invited the children and adolescents from Apartadó to take part in a workshop where young people from all around Colombia, including Juan Elias, came together to describe how violence was affecting them and to talk about how they could work for peace. "I realized that we in Apartadó were not alone," recalls Farliz. Out of this conference was born the Children's Movement for Peace.

The first goal of the Movement was to organize 500,000 youths to vote in a special referendum – the Children's Mandate for Peace and Rights. UNICEF provided funding and technical support for REDEPAZ (the National Network of Peace Initiatives) to help organize the voting, with assistance from the national Government. Many other groups became involved, including religious and children's organizations, the Catholic Church, the Colombian Red Cross, the Colombian Scouts and the YMCA. The intention was to empower the young people of Colombia as peacemakers and encourage the nation to listen to their voices.

About adolescents

- More than 1 billion people of the six billion in the world are between the ages of 10 and 19.
- Working with adolescents provides a unique opportunity to break a number of vicious, intergenerational cycles, such as gender discrimination, violence and poverty.
- Adolescents have a profound and direct influence on the next generation because of their roles as older siblings, heads of households, parents and members of civil society.
- They are filled with fresh ideas and know how we can best reach them with relevant interventions; they represent one of any society's most underutilized resources.
- Ensuring that teenagers participate in their communities and civil society is fundamental to protecting their right to development and to ensuring that their rights are protected and met.
- Providing adolescents with skills, information, support and services increases their capabilities to avoid or overcome many of the problems they are likely to encounter, such as violence, accidents, substance abuse and unwanted or unsafe sex.
- Adolescents are not a homogeneous group; they live in different circumstances and have varying needs. Recognizing their differences and responding to them will help ensure the rights of all adolescents – including those who are among the disadvantaged.

What happened next stunned the country: Six months after the plan was conceived, nearly 3 million children and adolescents turned out – roughly one third of the total population between the ages of 7 and 18. In many municipalities, the voter turnout was over 90 per cent. Of the dozen rights they could vote for, two thirds of the young voters chose the rights to survival, peace, family and freedom from abuse.

Several months following the election, Farliz and Juan Elias presided at a summit meeting with representatives from every organization that had supported the Mandate. Over three days, young Colombians aged 7 through 16 shared their ideas about what they should do in the name of peace and how young people could participate in a global peace process.

On 7 December 1996, Juan Elias Uribe – just a few months after his father’s murder – presented the Declaration of the Children’s Summit for Peace and Rights to Colombian President Ernesto Samper. Juan Elias declared, “We hope that you, Mr. President, and all adults in this country will look for all practical and feasible means to do away with violence and war, so that the children of Colombia will no longer be badly treated.”

Peace: A universal cause

The Children’s Movement for Peace inspired a war-weary and despairing nation to redouble efforts to end violence. The fragmented Colombian peace movement unified, and in January 1997, REDEPAZ, UNICEF and the anti-kidnapping organization País Libre announced that a Mandate for Peace, Life and Liberty would be placed before the Colombian people that October, during the regional elections. One hundred ‘peace points’ were established around the country where local governments and NGOs publicized and explained the Mandate. Young children and teenagers continued to feature prominently in the campaign.

One year after the children’s election, on 26 October 1997, more than 10 million adults went to the polls – over twice the turnout of previous elections. Their votes expressed their desire for an end to the war and to atrocities and to involving children under 18 in warfare.



The vote for the Mandate was symbolic but the political impact was real. Warring factions were finally denied their claim to represent ‘the people’, since 10 million citizens had overwhelmingly voted for peace. The Mandate succeeded in making peace the central focus of the 1998 presidential campaign. President Andres Pastrana took office in August 1998 wearing a green ribbon on his lapel, the symbol of the Citizen’s Mandate for Peace, Life and Liberty.

José Ramos-Horta, winner of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to win independence for East Timor, visited Colombia in 1997 and met Farliz Calle, Juan Elias Uribe and other participants in the Children’s Movement for Peace. He was so struck by the tenacity and vision of the young people that he nominated them for the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize. “The process initiated in Colombia has a chance to mobilize people and the world into a potent force for peace,” declared Mr. Ramos-Horta, surrounded by a group of children. “The cause they represent,” he said, motioning to the young faces around him, “is not only a Colombian cause. It is a universal cause.”

Once viewed only as the victims of war, children are now seen as the purveyors of peace. Leaders of the Children’s Movement for Peace, including Farliz Calle and Juan Elias Uribe, travelled to New York to visit the United Nations and, joined by 14-year-old Mayerly Sanchez, visited The Hague in the Netherlands to discuss their peacemaking strategies with children from other nations.

For Juan Elias Uribe, the tragic death of his father inspired him to work harder for peace: “My father’s death hit me very hard,” he says. “I thought that all the work I was doing for peace was worth nothing, because it had not saved him.... In the end, my father’s death gave me a more realistic attitude towards peace. I realized that if they did not stop me when my father was alive, they could do nothing to stop me now.”

Mayerly Sanchez explains, “Children have a special gift for convincing people about the truth of what is happening. People never used to care about the war unless they were directly affected by it. But when children talk about pain and sorrow, we make adults feel the pain as if it was their own. Children are the seed of the new Colombia. We are the seeds that will stop the war.”

The emblem for the Children’s Mandate for Peace in Colombia, ‘hands’ appeared all over the country on buttons, decals, flyers, walls and television screens.

HIV/AIDS will *not* have its way

Faced with the huge obstacle that HIV/AIDS places in the way of children's right to survive and develop, a truly global alliance for children has a rare opportunity – one missing from many other crises facing humanity. It can help prevent HIV/AIDS from spreading with a full-scale campaign to educate all people – adolescents and youth in particular – in how to break the patterns of discrimination and coercion that put them at risk.

The world has little valid excuse for not embarking on a strategy that is known to stop the spread of the virus: relevant information that is readily available, educational and health services that are accessible and cater to adolescents, and the direct involvement of young people in their own health, development and protection. Nor has the world an excuse for failing to undertake the specific actions recognized as crucial: teaching prevention to young people and

There are more than 10 million AIDS orphans living in Africa. This 12-year-old Ugandan girl lives with her elder sister since their mother died of the disease.



UNICEF/99-0307/PI/rozzi

teaching mothers how to reduce mother-to-child transmission, providing care and support to orphans and children affected by HIV/AIDS, and providing care and support to those AIDS workers and volunteers who are themselves HIV positive.

But no strategy or plan of action can prevent the spread of the disease by focusing only on personal behaviour. A range of measures, including testing, counselling, drug treatments and condom distribution, are needed, as is further research for vaccines and more affordable drug therapies and the identification of the best practices for reducing mother-to-child transmission of the virus. Counselling and social services are also needed to protect infants from infection and to support their HIV-positive mothers. And people and resources are crucial to provide compassionate care to those sick and dying from the disease and those children, immediate witnesses to its devastation, left orphaned.

Tragically, there is no indication that the resources needed will be forthcoming. If the international funds for poverty reduction have been a disgrace over this decade, the outlays to fight the global HIV/AIDS pandemic are an outrage. In 1996 and 1997, donor nations gave an estimated \$350 million each year to combat HIV/AIDS.¹⁰ In comparison, during the Asian financial crisis, IMF, the World Bank and rich countries gave \$60 billion to bail out the Republic of Korea. And in 1999, the cost of NATO's military operation in Kosovo and of rebuilding the shattered country of Yugoslavia is an estimated \$40 billion and growing.¹¹

International and national leaders faltered when they did not respond as swiftly and forcefully to the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa as they could have 15 years ago. They now have a rare second chance to marshal their resources to block the ongoing spread in Africa and similar outbreaks in other regions of the globe. What was indefensible before would be unconscionable today.

Within a single generation: The global agenda

There is renewed fervency on behalf of children as the 21st century begins, a clearer sense of what has to be done to promote and protect their rights and a surer sense that whatever needs to be done will be done. What children and all people need is well known: a world where rights are secure and people can thrive without injustice, disease and untenable poverty.

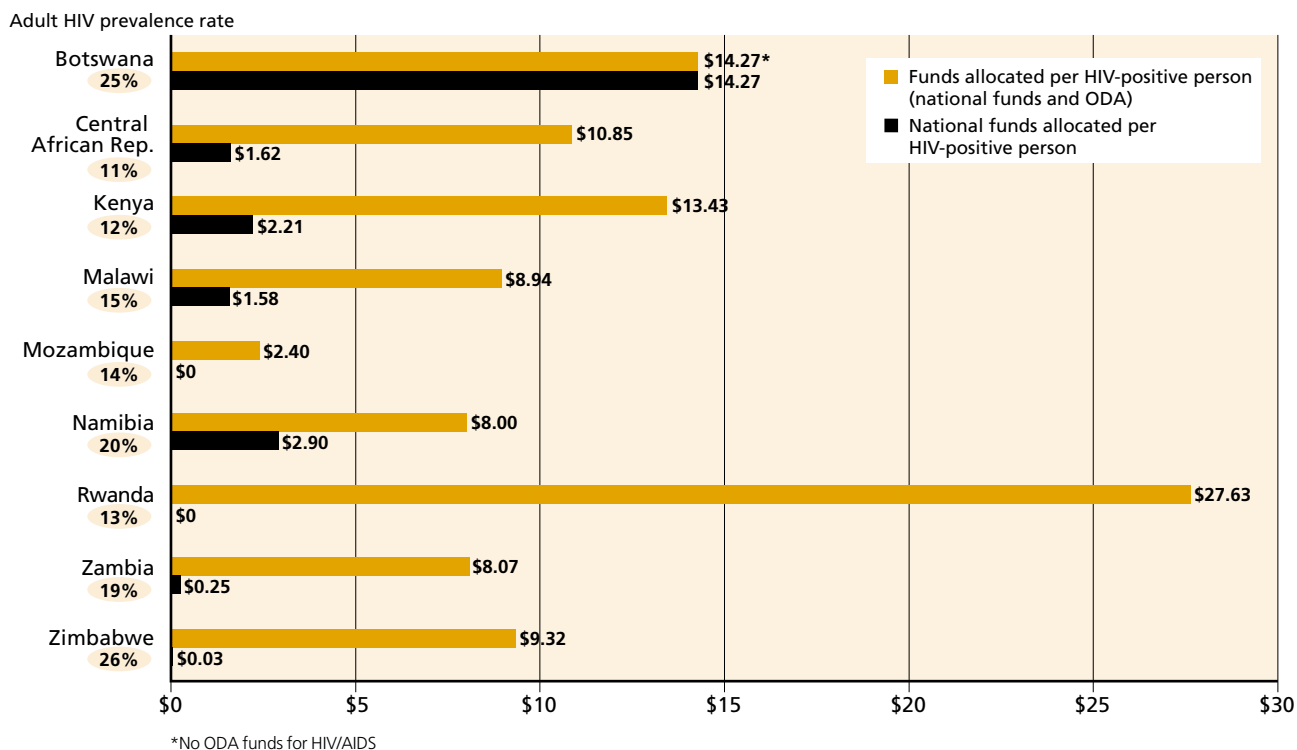
Research and practice have revealed that opportunities present themselves during early childhood, the primary school and adolescent years that are unmatched in their potential for beneficial change. Support and interventions at these points hold enormous promise for helping to break the intergenerational cycles that threaten children and

women. And they present the exciting possibility of breaking the cycles within a single generation.

Early childhood care

Science now tells us that optimal neural development in a child, which affects physical, mental and cognitive development, depends on the good nutrition and loving stimulation the child receives during the first months and years of life. Research also clearly illustrates the powerfully positive effects of the bonding and interaction between infants and young children and their parents and caregivers on all aspects of the child's survival, growth and develop-

Figure 7 Money spent on HIV/AIDS (1996 – US\$)



Source: UNAIDS and Harvard School of Public Health, *Level and flow of national and international resources for the response to HIV/AIDS, 1996-1997*.

ment. On the negative side, it demonstrates that poor nutrition may trigger a downward spiral for the child as malnourished infants, lacking energy, appetite and curiosity, may be less able than healthy babies to elicit their caregiver's attention and affection.

The long-term benefits of good prenatal care and breastfeeding, and especially the rich effects of talking and playing with infants from their earliest days, are commonly acknowledged. Communities and governments are increasingly committed to the idea that the best way to care for children is to ensure their access to integrated health and social services based in the community, in which the child and family are the focus.

These ideas are catching fire in communities around the world. In many of these settings, parents and local health, nutrition and education workers have embraced a broad perspective on children's well-being. Much of this work takes

place without fanfare, but, every day, significant changes in consciousness and practice are occurring somewhere.

In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Lao Women's Union on the Early Childhood and Family Development Project is a village-based community initiative in which traditional caregivers are taught about health, nutrition and the value of play and child-to-child activities. This vital training, provided both in centres and in the home, is a core feature of many other programmes in countries that include Jamaica, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Turkey.

The Community Childcare Project in Malawi is another pioneering effort integrating early childhood care with play in 216 community-based centres. Families attend the centres where they receive training in

nutrition and learn about opportunities for generating income. In addition, they receive play and teaching materials and tools for community gardens. There has also been a focus on broader issues of childcare sparked by widespread concerns about the situation of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS in the country.

Communities such as these are demonstrating that early, low-cost interventions can both help secure children's rights and save millions of dollars in later costs to society.

Quality education

The ability to claim and enjoy the rights of an informed and responsible citizen rests squarely upon a child's access to a good basic education. A quality education – one that encourages children's participation and critical thinking and is infused with the values of peace and human dignity – has the power to transform societies in a single generation. Furthermore, the fulfilment of a child's right to education offers protection from a multitude of hazards, such as a life consigned to poverty, bonded labour in agriculture or industry, domestic labour, commercial sexual exploitation or recruitment into armed conflict.

While the majority of the world's children are attending school, more than 130 million are not. Reasons and excuses for this failure abound: tuition and other fees overwhelm family incomes; teachers are poorly trained; and curricula are dull and irrelevant to children – and in this regard the industrialized countries are not spared. For girls in certain cultures, the lack of separate facilities, primarily or exclusively male teaching staff and the belief that girls need little education to be wives and mothers all keep them from getting a solid basic education.

The yearning and reverence for education, however, run deep in societies around the world. Thousands of communities have devised ingenious ways to improve education



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UNICEF/97-0612/Lemoyne

A health worker playfully covers the eyes of a boy with her hands in a village near Tbilisi (Georgia).

The education age, past due

The sights and sounds of learning are unmistakable and unforgettable. Children's voices swell and subside animatedly, as the teacher guides, encourages and supports the questioning and discussion, drawing everyone in and inviting their participation. Faces are intent, minds engaged, reticence overcome and equality encouraged. Ideas are shared and opinions and differences are respected.

A good school releases more energy than any laboratory with all its chemical and physical transformations. Education – more than any other single initiative – has the capacity to foster development, awaken talents, empower people and protect their rights. Investing in education is the surest, most direct way a country can promote its own economic and social welfare and lay the foundation for a democratic society.

Yet for far too few children is school as exciting and energizing as it could and should be. And millions more have no chance to attend any school at all: worldwide, more than 130 million school-age children are out of class. So while steam and atomic energy have lent their names to eras of human advance, the powerful age of education has yet to dawn in much of the world.

The best hope for garnering these benefits and ushering in the long-delayed age of education is child-friendly schools. Gaining momentum since the World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien (Thailand) in 1990, the child-friendly school movement is driven by the challenge of enrolling all children in primary school, matched by that of keeping them there. Improving the quality of education is crucial if the relentless economic, social and cultural pressures to drop out are to be resisted. This is particularly true for girls, who represent nearly 60 per cent of all children not enrolled in school, in violation of their right to education and a loss of talent and capacity that no society can long afford.

Girl-friendly = child-friendly

One prime gauge of educational quality is how narrow the classroom gender gap is. A school is truly child-friendly when both girls and boys

find it a safe, welcoming and healthful environment, centred on the rights of the child, where teachers demonstrate respect for those rights and where students discover that education is not only relevant to their lives but also a source of joy.



UNICEF/96-0528/Noorani

Slowly – some may say painfully so – the gender gap in primary education is narrowing, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa and South Asia – regions where it has historically been the widest. Persistence and creativity have brought this vital change, through measures such as the African Girls' Education Initiative, which UNICEF helped launch in 1994. With its support, for example, more girls are in school throughout Zimbabwe thanks to community discussion groups on gender issues and life skills workshops that are helping break patterns of gender imbalance and inequity.

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, it is high-level political commitment, backed with adequate resources, that is improving gender parity in primary schools: Since 1986, the primary school enrolment rate of girls has climbed from

Two girls share a textbook in a multi-grade public school in Davao, on the island of Mindanao (Philippines).

80 per cent to 96 per cent nationally. Even in rural areas – where enrolment rates are lowest for all children – girls’ enrolment rate has gone from 60 per cent to 80 per cent in the past five years.

More heartening is the fact that nearly 95 per cent of girls who enrol in primary school complete this level of education. And a new milestone was reached in 1999 when, for the first time, girls comprised 52 per cent of the students accepted into Iran’s public universities.

Golnar Mehran, a professor of education in Teheran, credits government policies, especially since 1985, with the increases. One simple but highly effective strategy has been the training of more women teachers, a vital measure given

Iranian social and cultural views on the segregation of the sexes. Many families are reluctant to send their daughters to schools with male teachers, and in fact all schooling up to the university level is separate for boys and girls. Now, with more women teachers, girls have more role models, and schools have become less threatening for both parents and students. Education officials have also sought to locate schools closer to communities to reduce the distances girls must travel.

More changes are needed, though, if schools are to become fully girl-friendly. These will entail revisions in texts and curricula so that they no longer stereotype girls and changes in teaching methods so that girls are encouraged to think critically and act independently. Their physical safety and security also must be ensured, and facilities must be built to meet their need for personal privacy.

Other, more resistant barriers to girls’ full participation in education remain. A survey in three Iranian provinces found that 25 per cent of those families whose daughters do not attend school believe that education is irrelevant for girls in their future roles as wives and mothers. Another 34 per cent said that poverty kept their daughters at home, because while education is compulsory and free through high school, there are always costs for supplies and uniforms – and thus daughters are likely to be kept at home so that sons can attend.

Nevertheless, Iran’s achievements are impressive, especially the changes in girls’ own thinking. Says Professor Mehran, “When we ask them what they want for their future they say, ‘I want to work, but if I don’t, I want to be educated.’”

The multiplication factor

The child-friendly schools initiative has taken off in earnest in the Philippines. The aim is to stem student attrition in a country where primary school enrolment rates are high for both boys and girls – 97 per cent and 96 per cent, respectively – but on average only 70 per cent of children will reach the milestone of fifth grade.

Poverty and geography conspire to thwart even the most committed students in the rugged mountainous terrain of rural areas, where children must trek to and from distant school-

About education

- Free access to a quality primary education is the right of every child without exception.
- The State is accountable and all of society is responsible to ensure that the right to education be realized for all children and all adolescents.
- For the child’s right to education to be fully realized, strong links must be maintained among service providers in education, health, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation, and child protection.
- Education systems and programmes must be designed with the best interests of the child and adolescent foremost. They must:
 - be healthy for children and adolescents;
 - protect all children and all adolescents;
 - assure gender equity in access and quality;
 - involve families and communities;
 - include family literacy programmes and parent and caregiver education in early childhood care;
 - be unified and comprehensive, diverse and flexible;
 - be efficiently managed and equitably financed;
 - use both formal and non-formal pedagogies;
 - assure that all students graduate with the essential skills, knowledge and values to succeed; and
 - use information and communication technologies to reduce disparities in access and quality.

houses, sometimes for hours. And, while education is free and compulsory through the elementary grades in the Philippines, the cost of books and supplies can strain a poor family's limited budget. Even in urban areas, where access to schools is easier, the lure of the streets or the need to earn income for the family leads many children to drop out of school.

The Philippine child-friendly schools initiative was launched by the Government and UNICEF in 1999 to counterbalance these factors, and it has already earned the enthusiastic support of teachers, administrators, parents and local officials. The welcome has been so warm that what started out as 24 multigrade model schools in 12 provinces has now mushroomed to 120 schools in 20 provinces and five cities. The child-friendly schools are scheduled to open for the school year in June 2000.

The Philippine approach has much in common with the Child-Friendly Schools Programme in Thailand, which began in 1998, supported by Save the Children (USA), UNICEF and other organizations. Introduced in 23 primary and middle schools in six provinces, the initiative was part of the sweeping educational reforms enacted to stem the haemorrhaging of students from schools in the face of the national economic crisis. In some villages, as many as 10 per cent of primary-school-age children have dropped out, raising the spectre of exploitative labour and crushing hopes for brighter futures built on education.

A 1997 constitutional guarantee of a free 12-year education provided by the State was an acknowledgement that, to thrive as a society, Thailand must ensure its citizens access to quality education. The child-centred approach to learning is key to these reforms. The goal is to establish at least five demonstration sites in each of Thailand's 12 education districts before the end of the year 2000.

Prepared to teach

For many teachers, the child-friendly approach can be a radical departure from traditional teaching methods. Nevertheless, there is a broad awareness that such change is needed to engage children as partners in their education and keep them coming to school.



Schoolgirls in class in Iran.

James Hopkins, Director of Save the Children's programme in Thailand, says that the cultural norms of how adults and children interact in school need to be understood so that teachers can take child-friendly teaching fully to heart. "When we listen closely," explains Mr. Hopkins, "we hear the fears of teachers who ask: 'In the future, will we have to bow to children? Will children stop bowing down when they pass us? How will we maintain discipline if we can no longer spank children?'"

Mobilizing community and parent support becomes critical, because with such support the child-friendly school truly becomes a place where children, teachers and parents work together, using a holistic approach to address the health, education, protection and participation needs of children as part of the full spectrum of child rights.

for all children and to attract and retain girls in school. Children are being educated in multigrade classrooms, in cluster schools and by radio. Two of the dozens of countries that are closing the enrolment gap between girls and boys are Chad and Yemen. In Chad, women are being trained as teachers to serve as role models for girls. In Yemen during 1998-1999, as many as 2,000 women teachers were trained in rural areas, and the Community Schools Project – which began in 1994 with approximately 1,000 girls in 120 villages – now reaches more than 11,000 girls who would not otherwise have received primary education. While communities provide classroom space in most of the villages, in some cases the classes meet under trees. More than 50 new classrooms have been constructed and another 25 classrooms repaired for the girls' schooling.

In addition to similar 'girl-friendly' activities, communities in Chad are attacking the economic hardship at the heart of families' decisions to keep their daughters at home to work. Families receive dry grain rations to compensate for their lost labour, and women have gained more time for gardening and sewing since labour-saving changes were introduced, such as grain mills, a village water tank and wagons to haul the water.

Adolescents

At once vulnerable and worldly, adolescents are a particularly heterogeneous group: in some societies, married or parents themselves; in others, alienated and isolated from the adult world or in need of special protection from sexual exploitation, child labour or recruitment into armed conflict. In still other societies, they head households because their parents have died from AIDS or as a result of war or violence. In many, they are the primary wage earners.

In all cases, the rights of adolescents to development and participation are ensured by the Convention on the Rights of the

Child. Protecting their rights is an effective 'immunization' that helps prevent sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, and reduces school drop-out rates, drug abuse and violent behaviour. Young people themselves have proven their ability to best reach and move other adolescents. Youth-friendly health services, already in place in Indonesia, Latvia, Namibia, Nigeria, Uganda, Ukraine and Zambia, are a case in point.

In Indonesia, for example, peer educators in health, together with local NGOs, target street and out-of-school youth. In Java, the activities combine relevant information on HIV/AIDS prevention and the teaching of life skills for vulnerable groups, addressing real-life situations of violence and risk among adolescents. In Sulawesi, 150 students in Islamic boarding schools have been trained as peer educators to reach 2,000 fellow students.

In every region of the world, countries are moving forward with a diverse range of programmes focusing on topics that illustrate the range of an adolescent's world: the age of marriage and child-bearing, girls' school enrolment, the nutritional status of girls, child labour, HIV/AIDS, armed conflict and family separation, child soldiers, sexual abuse and exploitation and female genital mutilation.

Because an estimated 250 million children living today will be killed by tobacco, UNICEF has joined WHO in efforts to put a stop to the gross violation of children's rights that tobacco use poses. The WHO/UNICEF collaboration, funded by the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships, seeks to accelerate national action to fight the targeting of youths by tobacco companies and will involve young people in all aspects of the planning and programme work.

Adolescents, like all children, have the right to be heard and to participate in matters affecting them and in which they have an interest, in accordance with their age and maturity. For adolescents, involvement in programmes specifically designed for them

and in more general community activities is a way of developing their talents and bolstering their confidence and sense of self, as well as contributing to the wider world. One intercountry project on adolescents' rights to participation and development is now under way in 13 countries – Bangladesh, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ghana, Jamaica, Jordan, Malawi, Mali, Mongolia, the Russian Federation and Zambia.

Youth from each of the countries have met to discuss and plan initiatives that are

designed to address the particular needs of the young people they represent. Programme planning will focus on a number of key issues, such as Youth-Friendly Health Services, access to education, peer counselling, freedom from exploitation and abuse, and safe spaces for meeting, recreation and sports.

Working to promote and protect the rights of adolescents is admittedly a relatively recent phenomenon for UNICEF but one which is gaining momentum as the new century begins.

Measures of humanity

When challenges are great, determining success is never simple. But certain benchmarks exist that help define universal standards of basic moral decency and against which the world can gauge the depth of its commitments and the success of its efforts.

Grounded in the principles and articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, they are goals around which a global alliance can come together on behalf of children – that infants start life healthy and young children are nurtured in a caring environment; that all children including the poorest and most disadvantaged complete a basic education of good quality; and that adolescents have the opportunities to develop fully and participate in their societies.

Each of these in its own right is worthy of a global movement. Taken together, they set down the basic structure of a humane society.

The world has more children living in poverty than it did 10 years ago. It is more unstable and more violent than it was in 1990 when leaders at the World Summit pledged to reach 27 goals for children and women by the year 2000.

What were not easy promises to keep in the last 10 years are even more difficult today, and so the leadership that is called for

now is qualitatively different than before. It is a leadership not only of governments but one broad enough to include all those in every country of every region who have embraced the cause of children as their own. As part of one of the more phenomenal movements in history, this 21st century leadership will be tested often and tested severely in the coming years.

It will need to be far-sighted enough to ensure that all pregnant women are adequately nourished and immediate enough to protect children from being deliberately slaughtered in conflict.

It will need to be as specifically focused as the monks who serve as HIV/AIDS community counsellors in the Mekong Delta region of East Asia and as broad as changing the world's mindset about the rights of women and children.

It will need to be on as grand a scale as the 1992 constitutional amendment in India – home to 1 billion people – that set aside a third of all governmental seats for women and a percentage of those for women of the lowest castes. And as personal as sending a young girl to school rather than keeping her at home.

No less will do.