

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UNICEF AND IYC
IYC

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There is an important difference between the scope of UNICEF's work and that of IYC, in that UNICEF is concerned with children of developing countries while IYC will be concerned with children of all countries. While the characteristics and the needs of children are universal, there are, unfortunately, significant differences in the degree to which their needs are being met.

In my opinion, the Year should remind us that all countries, are to some degree developing countries, in the sense that they all have enormous imperfections and faults - and this is perhaps more true with regard to the ways in which our diverse societies, world-wide, treat - and sometimes neglect - their children.

The major aims of the year may be summarized as follows:

- to encourage all countries, rich and poor to review their programmes for the well-being of children, and to mobilize support for national and local action programmes according to each country's conditions, needs and priorities;
- to heighten awareness of children's special needs among decisionmakers and the public;
- to promote recognition of the vital link between programmes for children, on the one hand, and economic and social progress on the other;
- to spur specific, practical measures to benefit children, in both the short and long term, on the national level.

If these aims are to be achieved, positive action must be taken without delay by governments throughout the world.

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The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purpose as education; society and the public authorities shall endeavour to promote the enjoyment of this right.

Principle 8

THE CHILD shall in all circumstances be among the first to receive protection and relief.

Principle 9

THE CHILD shall be protected against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation. He shall not be the subject of traffic, in any form.

The child shall not be admitted to employment before an appropriate minimum age; he shall in no case be caused or permitted to engage in any occupation or employment which would prejudice his health or education, or interfere with his physical, mental or moral development.

Principle 10

THE CHILD shall be protected from practices which may foster racial, religious and any other form of discrimination. He shall be brought up in spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood and in full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men.

RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

A. Constitutional Provisions

1. Fundamental Rights

Article 15 (3)

The State may make any special provision for (women and) children in regard to prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.

Article 24

Prohibition of the employment of children in factories, mines or hazardous employment below the age of 14 years.

2. Directive Principles

Article 39(e) and (f)

The State must direct its policy towards securing 'inter-alia' that children are not forced by economic necessity to enter vocations unsuited to their age and strength and that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment.

Article 45

The State must endeavour to provide free and compulsory education for all children until they complete 14 years of age.

B. The National Policy for Children, 1974

It shall be the policy of the State to provide adequate services to children, both before and afterbirth and through the period of growth, to ensure their full physical, mental and social development. The policy envisages:

1. A comprehensive health programme for all children.
2. Provision of nutrition services for children with the object of removing dietary deficiencies.
3. Provision of health care, nutrition and nutrition education for expectant and nursing mothers.
4. Provision of free and compulsory education for all children upto the age of 14, with special efforts to reduce wastage and stagnation in schools, particularly in the case of girls and children of the weaker sections of society. Provision of informal education for preschool children.
5. Out of school education for children who do not have access to formal education in schools.
6. Promotion of physical education, games, sports and other types of recreational as well as cultural and scientific activities in schools, community centres and other such institutions.
7. Special assistance to children belonging to economically weaker sections of the community, scheduled castes, and tribes, to ensure equality of opportunity.
8. Facilities for education, training and rehabilitation for children who have become delinquents, or been forced to take to begging or are otherwise in distress.
9. Protection of children against neglect, cruelty and exploitation.

10. Banning of employment in hazardous occupations and in heavy work for all children under 14.
11. Provision of facilities for special treatment, education, rehabilitation and care of physically handicapped, emotionally disturbed or mentally retarded children.
12. Priority for the protection and relief of children in times of distress and national calamity.
13. Special programmes to spot, encourage and assist gifted children, particularly those belonging to weaker sections of the community.
14. Amendment of existing laws so that in all legal disputes, the interests of children are given paramount consideration.
15. Strengthening of family ties so that full potentialities of growth of children are realised within the normal family, neighbourhood and community environment.

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LEGISLATION

Legislative support for child welfare services in India is found in the Children Acts of the various States. These laws have a special relevance to the protection and rehabilitation of socially handicapped children such as neglected, destitute, victimised, delinquent and exploited children.

The biggest drawback of the Children Acts is that the 'child' is defined differently from State to State. In Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, a child means a person under 16 years, in Saurashtra and West Bengal a person under 18 years, in Telengana a person under 16 years, and in the rest of Andhra Pradesh a person under 14 years. In the Union Territories, a child is defined as a boy under 16 years or a girl under 18 years. As inter-State movement of exploited children cannot be prevented, these laws are not as effective as they could have been.

Some States, like Nagaland, Orissa, Sikkim and Tripura, have yet to enact any children's legislation. The Union Territories of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Lakshadweep and Mizoram have no institutional arrangements yet to apply the Children Act of 1960.

Protecting the Working Child

The main thrust of the Indian laws concerning child labour has been on the minimum age of employment, medical examination of children and prohibition of night work. In each of these directions, the standards stipulated are below the international levels laid down by the International Labour Organisation. Enforcement of the law is rendered difficult by a combination of factors: economic backwardness forcing the family to supplement its income by letting the children work; lack of educational facilities; the unorganised nature of a good part of the economy; and the smallness of most manufacturing units.

Minimum Age

A major deficiency in the protective legislation is the fact that there is no law fixing a minimum age for employment in agriculture, though it is the main occupation in the country and the bulk of child labour, 78.7 per cent of it, is engaged in this occupation. A minimum age has been fixed however at 12 years for plantations, 14 years in factories and 12-14 years in the case of non-industrial employment. But this leaves the small sector unregulated: for example, the factories act itself applies only to factories employing workers above a minimum number.

Medical Fitness

As for legal safeguards for the health of child workers, the law requires medical examination of children upto 18 years of age and that too for industrial employment only. But no standards are laid down for medical fitness. And there is no law in respect of medical examination of children working in the non-industrial sector.

Adoption of Children

The Adoption of Children Bill was introduced in Parliament in 1972, but has yet to be enacted. Its aim is to provide an enabling law for all Indians seeking to adopt the many abandoned, destitute, neglected and orphaned children in the country. This was in pursuance of the Directive principle in the Constitution of preventing the moral and material abandonment of children (Article 39 f).

The existing Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act covers only that community.

Child Marriage

Throughout the 50 years of its existence, the Sharda Act (The Child Marriage Restraint Act) has been an ineffective legislative showpiece. Although it was meant to prohibit child marriage altogether, the question of validity of a child marriage solemnised in violation of the statutory age requirements remained outside its scope.

The Child Marriage Restraint Amendment Act 1978 raises the minimum age of marriage from 18 to 21 for boys and 15 to 18 for girls. Even with this amendment, the violation of the law would not affect the validity of the marriage once it has been conducted but only entail penal consequences. Offences under the Sharda Act have now become cognizable and even Muslim, Parsi and Jewish communities come within its purview even though it does not affect their personal laws. Parental consent no longer exempts a child marriage from the provisions of the amended law. This was a loophole in the original law.

Experience shows that legal changes may not cause marriages to be delayed, unless constructive opportunities are provided to the young persons whose marriages are sought to be postponed till the legally permissible age.

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CHILDREN IN NEED OF DAY-CARE

Many of India's children are neglected during early childhood for lack of day-care services. Shortage of such services often pulls an older sister out of school to shoulder the task, or forces a working mother to take small children to work sites, where they face added hazards.

The 1971 Census lists 16.6 million rural children and 2 million urban children less than 6 years old, whose mothers are workers. The 1971 data also lists 31 million women workers, of whom about 20 million belong to the most needy sections of society. About 94 per cent of women labourers work in the unorganised sector where employers do not provide any services for their children. Day-care facilities for the children of these working mothers remain a major unmet need.

What the Law Says

The law does provide for day-care services for children of certain categories of women workers, but many employers do not fulfil legal obligations. Women working in the unorganised sector, or in small establishments are not covered by such provisions. Nor are women as clerks, teachers, nurses, and similar lower-level white collar employees.

Under the Contract Labour Regulation and Abolition Act of 1970, a contractor must provide a creche wherever 20 or more women are employed as contract labour. This is seldom done.

Under the Factories Act (Section 48), every factory ordinarily employing 50 or more women workers has been obliged to provide and ~~maintain~~ maintain creches for children under 6 years old. But this stipulation of the Act is openly violated, and in 1973 there were only 901 factories in the country providing this facility. With the enforcement of the Factories (Amendment) Act of 1976, the obligation has been extended to every factory employing a minimum of 30 women workers.

The Plantation Labour Act of 1951 stipulates that every plantation employing 50 or more women workers should provide a creche for these workers' children. Strict enforcement of these laws is an urgent need. Day-care services are also badly needed by women workers falling outside the scope of these laws.

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JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Juvenile crime accounts for 3.4 per cent of all cognizable crime in India. Its rate is estimated to be 6.4 per 100,000 population.

Contributing Factors

There seems to be a strong relationship between poverty and the incidence of juvenile crime. It is found that the lower the income of the family, the higher the incidence of juvenile crime. Among the children arrested for crimes under the Indian Penal Code, it was found that 83 per cent belonged to families where the joint income of parents and guardians was less than Rs.150 per month; 13.4 per cent of families whose income was between Rs.150 and Rs.499 per month; 3.12 per cent to families whose income was between Rs.500 and Rs.1000 per month and 0.36 per cent to families whose income was above Rs.1000 per month.

Among the children apprehended, it was found that 48 per cent were illiterate, 34.6 per cent were below the primary level of schooling and 11.5 per cent were above the primary but below the higher secondary level.

Pattern of Crime

Among the crimes committed by juvenile delinquents are murder, kidnapping, abduction, dacoity, robbery, burglary, theft, riot, criminal breach of trust and cheating. The largest percentage of juvenile crimes fall under the Gambling Act, the Prohibition Act and the Indian Railways Act.

The Spread

About 30 per cent of juvenile crime was reported in Maharashtra, followed by 18 per cent in Gujarat, 16 per cent in Tamil Nadu and 11.5 per cent in Madhya Pradesh.

Among the children apprehended, it was found that 17 per cent had been apprehended for repeated crimes.

Enforcement of Laws

Most of the Children Acts have a clause for providing a 'place of safety' where child offenders can be kept in custody separately from the adult offenders. Despite this, it is estimated that in the various States and Union Territories of India, there are 10,000 children under 16 years of age confined to prisons along with adult offenders.

Existing legislation in most States does not mention anything about the time limit for detention of the child till he is brought before the court. Often, because of this, children are kept in detention for long periods without being brought before a magistrate. Magistrate.

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WORKING CHILDREN

Lack of data makes it difficult to arrive at a reliable figure of the number of children pushed into the labour force by economic pressures. The 1971 Census listed 10.7 million children as workers, but estimates indicate that the total child labour force may be as high as 30 million.

If it is assumed that 5 to 10 per cent of India's children are working, India has the largest number of children workers in the world. These children constitute about 6 per cent of the total labour force in the country.

Of the 10.7 million children classified as workers in 1971 Census data, 7.9 million were boys and 2.8 million girls. This data does not seem to adequately reflect the role of girls in the family-based economy. The proportion of girls to female adult workers has been found to be about 10 per cent higher than the proportion of boys to male adult workers.

Where they work

Where do child labourers work? The majority are in agriculture or farm related work, or in the unorganised sector. Of the 10.7 million listed as child labour in 1971, only those working in the organised sector of the economy are expected to benefit from various child protection laws. Most child workers are outside the scope of such protective legislation. Out of the known figures, about 78.7 per cent work as cultivators and agricultural labourers, and another 8.2 per cent are engaged in livestock raising, forestry, fishing, hunting, plantation and orchard work. About 6 per cent are in manufacturing and processing jobs, and another 6 per cent in household and other industries, with the rest engaged in trade, commerce, transport and ~~in~~ storage.

The number of children employed in the unorganised sector is not reflected in Census data and can only be guessed at. This sector accounts for children working as domestic servants, helpers in hotels, restaurants, canteens, wayside shops and similar establishments; hawkers, newspaper vendors, porters, shoe-shine boys, sweepers and scavengers, children employed in small workshops and repair shops, and helpers at construction sites engaged in breaking stones, loading and unloading goods. Their hours of work are long, their wages low and uncertain, their working and living conditions bad. They are at the mercy of their employers.

Where They Come From

According to the 1971 data, about 93 per cent of child workers belong to rural areas. They constitute 5.3 per cent of the total rural child population. The 7 per cent of child workers found in urban areas constitute 1.8 per cent of the total urban child population. The 1971 data places the incidence of child labour as highest in Andhra Pradesh, which accounts for 15.2 per cent of India's total child labour force, and 9 per cent of the State's labour force. The next highest recorded incidence is in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa.

Frequent migration seems to encourage early employment of children. Data indicates that as many as 80 per cent of the children of migrants are workers. This is four times higher than the rate among settled populations.

What It Means

Child labour deprives children of educational opportunities, minimises their chances for vocational training, hampers their intellectual development and by forcing them into the army of unskilled labourers, condemns them to low wages all their lives.

It is estimated that if workers under 18 years of age in India could be taken out of the labour force and provided education and vocational training, some 15 to 20 million unemployed adults would be able to find jobs on standard wages.

Exploitation

Existing legislation covering child workers in factories and establishments is not being adequately enforced. There are also areas where no legislative coverage exists, and others where the laws themselves permit early childhood employment*.

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THE DEPRIVED CHILD

The Submerged Segment

An estimated 46 per cent of the population live below the poverty line - 48 per cent in the rural areas and 41 per cent in the urban areas. This means that approximately 108 million children live in varying degrees of destitution, 90.5 million of them in the villages and 17.4 million in the towns.

The Depressed Classes

There is a predictable overlapping of the child population living in poverty and that belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The vast majority of children belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes live in an environment that hampers even a minimum development, like urban slums, shanty towns, backward villages, and inaccessible tribal areas.

About 21.5 per cent of the total child population belongs to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Among the 33.5 million Scheduled Caste children, 29.6 million live in the rural areas, and 14.8 million of these are below 6 years of age. All but 500,000 of the 15.9 million children of Scheduled Tribes live in rural areas, and 7.7 million of them are under 6 years old.

Destitute and Vagrant Children

The 1971 Census listed 151,000 children as beggars or vagrants -- 120,000 in rural areas and 30,000 in the towns. Of those listed, West Bengal - with 26 per cent of the national total - accounted for the largest number. Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Orissa have the next largest incidence of beggary, in that order. It is likely that the actual number of children in India pushed into beggary is greater than the Census data indicates. Police records show that nearly a third of all beggar children have one or both parents living; the parents themselves use their children for begging. Other children may be victims of cruel exploitation in beggar colonies, where kidnapped waifs and strays are maimed and mutilated and forced to beg. Their earnings go to the so-called beggar barons.

'Throw-away' Babies

It is estimated that about a million babies out of the 21 million born every year become 'throw away' babies, abandoned soon after birth due to various social and economic pressures. Social Workers' estimates place the number of destitute, orphaned and abandoned children at between one and five per cent of the total child population. Only about 25,000 of such children are in the care of some kind of institution. In most orphanages, female children outnumber males, reflecting the greater value placed on sons in Indian society.

Children of Migrants

Migrants are usually unskilled, displaced labourers moving from place to place in search of work. They seldom manage to get more than casual daily wages or short-term, seasonal employment. In 1971, the Census listed 4.2 million children belonging to migrant families who had been in their place of residence for less than one year. Of these, 3.3 million children were in the rural areas, and 0.9 million in urban areas.

Most migrant families live at subsistence level. They do without protected water supply, without proper housing, sanitation or sewage services, and are often outside the radius of medical and schooling facilities. Migrants' children grow up exposed to disease and disability, and deprived of a settled existence. Formal education barely figures in their lives.

Both boys and girls of migrant families take up petty jobs to add to the meagre family earnings. An urban study showed that while about 19 per cent of the children of settled city-dwellers were workers, child labour among migrant children was as high as 80 per cent. There is no comparable data available on the labour rate among children of rural migrants.

Poor nutrition, low resistance to disease and insanitary conditions combine to undermine the physical status of the migrant child. While the urban infant mortality rate is otherwise 83 per 1000, in some urban slums and migrant settlements it is as high as 140 per 1000.

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HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

Four major disabilities afflict at least three million children in the country. Estimates list 2 million mentally retarded, 800,000 blind, 500,000 orthopaedically handicapped and 200,000 deaf children.

These modest estimates do not include the large number of children who are marginally or mildly handicapped. While about 12,000 to 14,000 children go blind every year due to Vitamin A deficiency, about 10 to 15 per cent of all children suffer from night blindness. Available data does not give a clear picture of the actual incidence of these and other **handicaps**.

Services and facilities for the education, training and rehabilitation of handicapped children are grossly inadequate. Existing services cater to only 4 per cent of the physically handicapped, 2 per cent of the blind, 2 percent of the deaf and barely 0.2 per cent of the known mentally retarded child population. There are only 800 voluntary organisations and State institutions offering educational and training facilities to about 30,000 handicapped children.

Prevailing social attitudes towards mental and physical handicaps are an additional problem for the handicapped child.

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E D U C A T I O N

A Directive Principle of the Indian Constitution (Article 45) lays down that the State shall endeavour to provide free and compulsory education for all children until they complete 14 years of age. This was to have been achieved within a decade, but has not been realised so far.

The progress has been uneven from State to State, as between the urban and rural areas and as between boys and girls. For example, all urban areas have facilities for elementary and middle school education. In rural areas, 80 per cent of the habitations have a primary school within 1.5 km and over 60 per cent of the habitations have a middle school within 3 km. Out of a total of 575,926 villages in the country, it is estimated that about 48,566 are not served by any school at all.

Education is free for all children upto the secondary stage in 12 States and Union Territories. In 8 other States and Union Territories, it is free for all children upto the middle school stage. Another 8 States offer free education for all children upto the middle school stage, and upto a few more years only for girls. Two States offer free education for all children upto the primary school level and one of them offers an additional few years of free education for girls.

School Enrolment

Approximately 4.5 million children are being offered one kind of pre-primary programme or the other. These form barely 5 per cent of the population in the 3-6 years age group and are mainly from the better-off sections of society.

Enrolment in schools has been slower than expected. Only 80.9 per cent of children in the 6-11 years age group, 37.0 per cent in the 11-14 years age group and 20.9 per cent children in the 14-17 years age group are enrolled in schools. The enrolment level for girls is much lower than that for boys. While the enrolment of boys of the 6-11 years age group is 97.5 per cent, it is only 63.5 per cent for girls of that group. In the 11-14 years age group, the enrolment of boys is 48.7 per cent, but that of girls is only 24.5 per cent. The gap widens further at the high school level (14-17 years) with enrolment of boys at 28.8 per cent and that of girls at just 12.3 per cent.

Drop-Out Rates

The school enrolment figures provide only one aspect of children's education, another being the rate of dropping out from school.

Out of every 100 children who enter Class I, less than half complete Class V and only 24 complete Class VIII. The drop-out rate for girls is much higher. Of every 100 girls who ~~get~~ join Class I, only about 30 reach Class V. Thus, 70 per cent of girls who get enrolled leave school without attaining functional literacy.

HEALTH

Children in India face many health hazards, and many die young for lack of timely health care.

Forty per cent of all deaths in India occur among children below 5 years of age. Of these deaths, about half are of children less than a year old.

In the lowest age group (0-12 months), 50 per cent of deaths are due to dysentery, diarrhoea, respiratory diseases and gastro-intestinal disorders. In the 1-4 year group, mortality seems to be specifically related to respiratory, digestive and parasitic diseases. These in turn are aggravated by poor environmental sanitation, over-crowded living conditions, and malnutrition. Ignorance of simple health precautions also takes its toll.

It is estimated that 30 per cent of all school-going children are suffering from one or other ailment. Of children's illnesses treated at health centres, 56 per cent are reported to be related to intestinal infections, respiratory complaints and nutritional disorders. Eye ailments and defects due to poor diet and poor hygiene are also common, and many children needlessly go blind in early childhood. Tuberculosis is widespread in small children.

Health Services

About 80 per cent of Indians live in rural and tribal areas, but only 30 percent of hospital beds and 20 percent of doctors in the country are available there.

Medical care for the rural population is provided by government-run primary health centres. Each centre is expected to serve from 70,000 to 80,000 people, spread over a hundred villages, with the help of two doctors. Some PHCs have only one doctor. Each PHC auxiliary nurse-midwife serves 10,000 people in 10 to 12 villages. The average distance between the village and the health centre is 9 km., and about 87 per cent of people attending the PHCs are from villages within a 6.4 km radius. Many children do not get timely attention because 50 per cent of village women are daily wage earners, and they cannot carry their small children to the PHC without losing family earnings. Under the government's new rural health scheme, villagers trained as community health workers are gradually extending health care to village homes. At the time of childbirth, few women receive skilled assistance; the proportion ranges from 20 to 50 per cent in different parts of the country.

The number of hospital beds for children - about 9,300 - is barely 50 per cent of the minimum requirement, and the country has only 25 children's hospitals and 424 paediatric wards - to meet the needs of nearly 250 million children. Most of these are located far from the villages. There are major regional disparities: Bihar, Gujarat and Haryana do not have any children's hospitals at all.

The existing maternal and child health services reach only a small proportion of the women and children who need them. Women in the 15-45 age group constitute nearly 22 per cent of the population, and children in the 0-6 age group comprise another 21 per cent. Meeting the health needs of this 43 per cent of the population remains a major national task.

Water and Health

Water-borne and water-related diseases are the leading killers of infants and children. About 163 million children (0-14 years) in rural India do not have access to safe drinking water, and ~~the~~ are thus exposed to infection which can prove fatal.

In 113,000 villages, the drinking water supply is either more than 1.6 km away, or is sub-standard, and is responsible for diseases like cholera and guinea-worm, or problems related to a mineral content too high for health.

In another 214,000 villages, the water supply from wells, streams, tanks, ponds and rivers, is adequate in quantity, but is open to the risk of pollution.

There are at least 185,000 villages where the supply of water is both inadequate and unprotected.

NUTRITION

Malnutrition is a major cause of death among children in India. Every month 1,00,000 children die from its effects. An even larger number of children die of infectious diseases, their poor diet having made them susceptible to infection and vulnerable thereby to death.

Children survive malnourishment depending on the degree of deficiency. For every child who shows clinical signs of malnutrition, there are probably at least 4 children suffering from milder grades of malnutrition without clinically apparent in India.

Approximately 80 to 90 per cent of Indian children do not receive adequate amounts of key vitamins and minerals; 75 per cent do not receive adequate calories and about 50 per cent do not receive enough proteins.

Acute diarrhoeal diseases are more frequent and serious among these malnourished children than among those of normal nutritional status.

Pre-School Children

Some 60 per cent of children in the 0-6 years age group suffer from nutritional anaemia and protein-calorie malnutrition in one form or the other. Almost 40 per cent of all deaths in the country occur in this age group and the majority of these fatal cases are attributed to kwashiorkor, vitamin A deficiency and anaemia. Again, three-fourths of the children in this age group have body weights below 75 per cent of the standard weight of well-nourished children, 52 per cent suffer from moderate malnutrition, 23 per cent from severe malnutrition and only 3 per cent can be considered as having normal body weight.

Children from the low socio-economic strata suffer the worst, 80 per cent of them are victims of moderate or severe protein-calorie malnutrition, as shown by their sub-standard body weights.

School-Going Children

It is estimated that 22 per cent of the school-going children show one or more signs of nutritional deficiency. The most common are anaemia, and lack of vitamin A and Vitamin B-Complex. A much higher proportion of school-going children from low socio-economic groups (56 per cent) show signs of moderate protein-calorie malnutrition, while 15 per cent show severe malnutrition, reflected in sub-standard body weights.

Vitamin A Deficiency

About 2.5 million children in India are threatened by blindness in early childhood because their diet lacks Vitamin A. Severe Vitamin A deficiency is estimated at a million cases. About 12,000 to 14,000 children of the toddler age group go blind every year because of this deficiency. Lack of the vitamin is also behind the night blindness that afflicts about 10-15 per cent of all children.

One out of every four cases of blindness is due to dietary deficiency of Vitamin A, and is therefore preventable. The peak incidence of such blindness is in the 1-5 years age group.

Child Nutrition and the Family

Maternal malnutrition is a major contributory factor in the premature birth of an infant. It has been found that 36 per cent of infant deaths are due to prematurity.

Studies also indicate that when the family size is small, the nutritional level of each child is better, while in larger families, the children born later are more prone to nutritional deficiencies. Research indicates that among the first three children born to a family, only 17 per cent show signs of malnutrition, while among the fourth and younger children 32 per cent had malnutrition symptoms.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Of the 1550 million children in the world, one in every six is an Indian. The 248 million children of India thus comprise nearly 16 per cent of all the world's children.

India's population is rising faster than the world rate, and the addition of some 13 million infants every year gives India one of the world's youngest populations. The 1971 Census showed that 42 per cent of the Indian population consists of children under 14 years of age. Children below 6 years comprise 21 per cent of the population.

An index of the population composition is that while the entire population of India in 1911 was 252 million, projections indicate that children alone already numbered 248 million in 1976, and a more recent estimate puts the child population in 1977 at 255 million. The Twentieth Century will close with the number of children in India almost certainly exceeding the total Indian population of 279 million recorded in the 1931 Census.

Urban-Rural Ratios

An estimated 81 per cent of India's children live in the rural areas. According to population projections for 1976, the rural children number 183.9 million, tribal children 14.9 million and urban children 49.7 million. These projections also indicate that nearly half of India's children (48.7 percent) are below 6 years of age. Of the 121 million in this age group, 89.7 million live in the villages and 7.3 million in tribal areas, while 24.2 million are in urban areas.

Living Conditions

According to 1976 projections, about 99.4 million children -- nearly two-fifths of the total Indian child population -- live in conditions adverse to survival. Of them, 48.5 million, or nearly half, are less than 6 years old.

The 1976 estimates place 35.8 million of these youngest deprived children in rural areas, 9.7 million in urban areas and 2.9 million in tribal areas. In the next age group (7-14 years), 50.9 million children live in extreme poverty -- 37.7 million in the villages, 10.2 million in towns and cities and 3 million in tribal areas.

A more recent estimate (April 1977), indicates that as many as 126 million children may be living below the poverty line.