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Children Speak

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A Newsletter of the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights

Message from the President

Article 28 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* requires States to ensure that primary education is free and compulsory. Unfortunately, education is not compulsory in at least 25 countries and this figure is probably even higher since many countries fail to report whether education is or is not compulsory or report unclear information. (*Right to Education 2004 Project, www.right-to-education.org*)

There are many barriers to improving the condition of children in education and literacy: lack of funding and resources, political instability and lack of objectivity, behaviours and attitudes of society towards child rights, high poverty rate and malnutrition, children working to supplement insufficient family income (child labour), gender-based, tribal-based or religion-based cultural values, lack of child-friendly educational policies, radical reduction of skilled, trained and educated workforce due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, poor quality of education system, services and planning....While the list is long, there is one fact that cannot be denied, some governments allocate resources to goals and programs that put children's education at the bottom end of the priority list.

As has been already mentioned in one of my previous Messages, there is a great need worldwide for a

preventative, systemic and progressive education programme that would focus on: children's rights; global citizenship and its responsibilities; self-esteem; respect, tolerance and

appreciation for all cultures, races, religions and people; conflict resolution and peace studies; responsible and positive joint-parenting; nutrition and health choices; discipline; and other areas of concern critical to the well-being of children, youth and their families. The OPCR has been advocating for the creation of such a programme and its integration into the school curriculum starting from pre-kindergarten to the end of high school - for years now.

We must all rally together - academia, corporate sector, NGOs, civil society, legislators and the citizens of the world, to achieve what can be recognized as an attainable objective: the education of our youth. Once we understand that we must coordinate our collective efforts, it will be the beginning of a new world.

Together, we can and will make a difference for the love of our children! ■



Riccardo Di Done



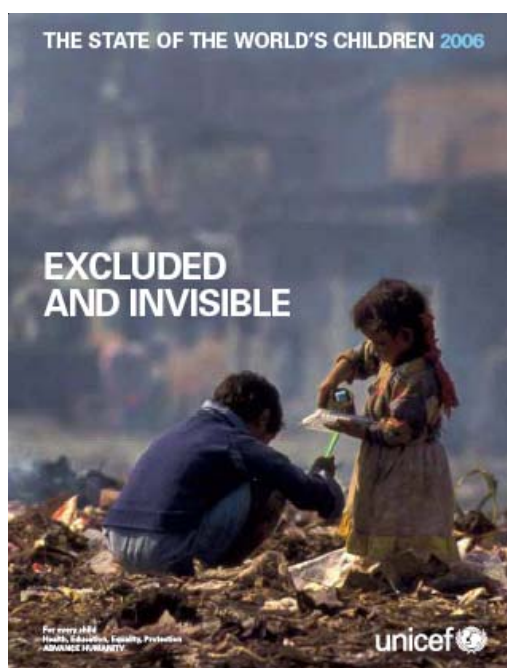
Excluded & Invisible CHILDREN

The State of the World's Children 2006 focusses on our commitments towards excluded, neglected, discriminated and poor children. Excerpts from the Executive Summary

Meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the broader aims of the Millennium Declaration would transform the lives of millions of children who would be spared illness and premature death, escape extreme poverty and malnutrition, gain access to safe water and decent sanitation facilities and complete primary schooling.

Though some regions and countries have fallen behind, the goals can still be met. The Member States of the United Nations are committed to meeting the MDGs and have coalesced around a set of key initiatives to accelerate progress. Putting these initiatives into practice will demand renewed commitment to the Millennium agenda and additional resources. It will also require a much stronger focus on reaching those children currently excluded from essential services and denied protection and participation. Unless many more of these children are reached, several of the MDGs - particularly the goal on universal primary education - will simply not be met on time or in full.

The children who are hardest to reach include those living in the poorest countries and most deprived communities; children facing discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, disability or membership of an indigenous group; children caught up in armed conflict or affected by HIV/AIDS; and children who lack a formal identity, who suffer child protection abuses or who are not treated as children. These children, the factors that exclude them and make them invisible, and the actions that those responsible for their well-being must take to safeguard and include them are the focus of *The State of the World's Children 2006*.



The Root Causes of Exclusion

At the national level, the root causes of exclusion are poverty, weak governance, armed conflict and HIV/AIDS. Statistical analyses of key MDG indicators related to child health and education show a widening gap between children growing up in countries with the lowest level of development, torn by strife, underserved by weak governments or ravaged by HIV/AIDS and their peers in the rest of the developing world. These factors not only jeopardize these children's chances of

benefiting from the Millennium agenda, they also increase the risk that they will miss out on their childhood and face continued exclusion in adulthood.

Because the MDGs are based on national averages, inequalities among children within the same country that contribute to, and result in, their exclusion may be obscured. Disaggregated data from national statistics and household surveys indicate sharp disparities in children's rate of survival, health, school attendance and completion on the basis of household income and geographic location.

Tackling these factors requires swift and decisive action in four key areas:

Poverty and inequality. Adjusting poverty-reduction strategies and expanding budgets or reallocating resources to social investment would assist millions of children in the poorest countries and communities.

Armed conflict and 'fragile' States. The international community must seek to prevent and resolve armed conflict and engage with countries with weak policy/institutional framework to protect children and women and

provide essential services. Emergency responses for children caught up in conflict should include services for education, child protection and the prevention of HIV transmission.

HIV/AIDS and children. Greater attention should be given to the impact of HIV/AIDS on children and adolescents and to ways of protecting them from both infection and exclusion. The Global Campaign on Children and HIV/AIDS will play a significant role in this regard.

Discrimination. Governments and societies must openly confront discrimination, introduce and enforce legislation prohibiting it and implement initiatives to address exclusion faced by women and girls, ethnic and indigenous groups and the disabled.

Invisible Children

At the extremes, children can become invisible, in effect disappearing from view within their families, communities and societies and to governments, donors, civil society, the media, the private sector and even other children. For millions of children, the main cause of their invisibility is violations of their right to protection.

Firm evidence of the extent of these violations is hard to acquire, but several factors appear central to increasing the risk of children becoming invisible: the lack or loss of formal identification, inadequate State protection for children without parental care, the exploitation of children through trafficking and forced labour, and premature entry of children into adult roles such as marriage and combat. Children affected by these factors include those not registered at birth, refugees and displaced children, orphans, street children, children in detention, children in early marriages, hazardous labour or combat and trafficked and indentured children.

Making children visible requires creating a protective environment for them. The key elements of a protective environment include:

- **Strengthening the capacity of families and communities to care for and protect children.**
- **Government commitment to child protection by providing budgetary support and social welfare policies targeted at the most excluded and invisible children.**

For millions of children, the main cause of their invisibility is violations of their right to protection.

- **Ratification and implementation of legislation, both national and international, concerning children's rights and protection.**

- **Prosecution of perpetrators of crimes against children and avoidance of criminalizing child victims.**

- **An open discussion by civil society and the media of attitudes, prejudices, beliefs and practices that facilitate or lead to abuses.**

- **Ensuring that children know their rights, are encouraged to express them and are given vital life skills and information to protect themselves from abuse and exploitation.**

- **Availability of basic social services to all children without discrimination.**

- **Monitoring, transparent reporting and oversight of abuses and exploitation.**

Key to building the protective environment is responsibility: All members of society can contribute to ensuring that

children do not become invisible. While families and the State have the primary responsibility for protecting children, ongoing and sustained efforts by individuals and organizations at all levels are essential to break patterns of abuse.

Including Children

Governments bear the primary responsibility for reaching out to excluded and invisible children and need to step up their efforts in four key areas:

Research: Strong research is essential to effective programming, but reliable data on these children is currently in short supply.

Legislation: National legislation must match international commitments to children. Legislation that entrenches discrimination must be amended or abolished.

Financing and capacity-building: Legislation and research on excluded and invisible children must be complemented by child-focused budgets and institution-building.

Programmes: Service reform to remove entry barriers to essential services for excluded

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Mahatma Gandhi

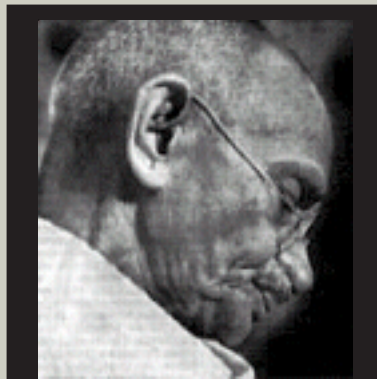
ON EDUCATION

Given Gandhi's values and his vision of what constituted a truly civilized and free India, it was not surprising that he developed firm views on education. He was aware that he had been a beneficiary of Western education and for a number of years while he was in South Africa he still tried to persuade Indians to take advantage of it. However, it was not until the early years of this century, when he was in his middle thirties, that he became so opposed to English education that he could write about 'the rottenness of this education' and that 'to give millions a knowledge of English is to enslave them ... that, by receiving English education, we have enslaved the nation'.

He did not blame the colonial powers for this. He saw that it was quite logical that they would want an elite of native Indians to become like their rulers in both manners and values. In this way, the Empire could be consolidated. Later in his life he was to declare that 'real freedom will come only when we free ourselves of the domination of Western education, Western culture and Western way of living which have been ingrained in us.'

The core of his alternative education proposal was the introduction of productive handicrafts in the school curriculum. The idea was not simply to introduce handicrafts as a compulsory school subject, but to make the learning of a craft the centerpiece of the entire teaching programme. It implied a radical restructuring of the sociology of school knowledge in India, where productive handicrafts had been associated with the lowest groups in the hierarchy of the caste system. Knowledge of the production processes involved in crafts, such as spinning, weaving, leatherwork, pottery, metalwork, basket-making and bookbinding, had been the monopoly of specific caste groups in the lowest stratum of the traditional social hierarchy.

Many of them belonged to the category of 'untouchables'. India's own tradition of education as well as the colonial education system had emphasized skills such as literacy and acquisition of knowledge of which the upper castes had a monopoly. Gandhi's proposal intended to stand the education system on its head.



**"The real difficulty is that people have no idea of what education truly is. We assess the value of education in the same manner as we assess the value of land or of shares in the stock-exchange market. We want to provide only such education as would enable the student to earn more. We hardly give any thought to the improvement of the character of the educated. The girls, we say, do not have to earn; so why should they be educated? As long as such ideas persist there is no hope of our ever knowing the true value of education."
- M. K. Gandhi on True Education**

Why Gandhi proposed the introduction of productive handicrafts into the school system was not really as outrageous as may appear. What he really wanted was for the schools to be self-supporting, as far as possible. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, a poor society such as India simply could not afford to provide education for all children unless the schools could generate resources from within. Secondly, the more financially independent the schools were, the more politically independent they could be. What Gandhi wanted to avoid was dependence on the state which he felt would mean interference from the centre. Above all else, Gandhi valued self-sufficiency and autonomy. These were vital for his vision of an independent India made up of autonomous village communities to survive. The right to autonomy that Gandhi's educational plan assigns to the teacher in the context of the school's daily curriculum is consistent with the libertarian principles that he shared with Tolstoy.

Gandhi wanted to free the Indian teacher from interference from outside, particularly government or state bureaucracy. Under colonial rule, the teacher had a prescribed job to do that was based on what the authorities wanted the children to learn. Textbooks were mandatory so that Gandhi found that 'the living word of the teacher has very little value.' Gandhi's plan implied the end of the teacher's subservience to the prescribed textbook and the curriculum. Of equal, if not more importance, was the freedom it gave the teacher in matters of curriculum. It denied the state the power to decide what teachers taught and what they did in the classroom. It gave autonomy to the teacher but it was, above all, a libertarian approach to schooling that transferred power from the state to the village.

Gandhi's conception of basic education was concerned with learning that was generated within everyday life which is the basis on which informal educators work. It was also an education focused on the individual but reliant on co-operation between individuals. ■

Child Participation 2006

Improving Services to Change Lives

This one day conference to be held on 19 January 2006 at the Cavendish Conference Centre, London, in association with Scope, Children's Express and NCH will build on the success of last year's Child Participation event by providing the latest policy guidance from the government, creating an opportunity to hear from young people, as well as facilitating a forum for discussion and practical application.

It will provide information for all professionals coming into contact with children as well as facilitate interactive forums where delegates can openly discuss issues of participation, whilst considering practical methods to consult children and improve services. Crossing all sectors including early year's services, health, police, education, care providers and the independent and charitable sectors, this conference will discuss examples of good practice and disseminate information obtained through consulting children on various issues that affect their lives. ■

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Reclaiming Lost Childhood

In a breakthrough agreement the United Arab Emirates, in consultation with UNICEF, banned the use of underage camel jockeys. Since November 2004 the government has been sending the boys back to their home countries.

Before they travel home the children receive counselling, nutritious meals and new clothes. In accordance with the agreement more than 1,000 camel jockeys – mostly from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sudan – have been sent home so far. And the UAE agrees to support the children financially for two years to help them reintegrate into their families and

Events

societies.

Once the boys arrive in Pakistan they are received at a child protection centre in Lahore. There, they are given psychosocial support, medical check ups, and a chance to once again play like normal children. Reuniting these children with their families has proven to be a more difficult task.

UNICEF Pakistan/2005/Asad Zaidi

Excluded & Invisible Children

children is urgently required in many countries and communities. Packaging services can increase access, as can the use of satellite and mobile services for children in remote or deprived locations.

Other actors also have a role to play. Donors and international organizations must create an enabling environment through bold and well conceived policies on aid, trade and debt relief. Civil society must acknowledge its responsibilities to children and be part of the solution. The private sector must adopt ethical corporate practices that ensure that children are never exploited. The media can become a vehicle for empowerment by providing people with accurate information and by challenging attitudes, prejudices and practices that harm children. Finally, children themselves can play an active part in their own protection and that of their peers.

Working Together

Creating a world fit for children may seem impossibly far away, but achieving it is as simple as this: We must do everything in our power to keep our commitments to children. These commitments are clear and unambiguous. What is now required is the understanding that a commitment is a pledge with both moral and practical obligations. In a moral sense, a commitment signifies a relationship of duty. In practical terms, a commitment binds those making it to a course of action.

This was implicitly recognized at the Millennium Summit in 2000, which translated fine words and noble aspirations into time-bound development objectives in the Millennium Declaration - against which the world's leaders undertook to be measured and held accountable.

The Millennium agenda for children is eminently attainable. What is needed now is firm and decisive action on three key fronts over the next 10 years. At the September 2005 World Summit, world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Achieving the MDGs must be the first step towards providing universal access to essential services, protection and participation for children. Those countries falling behind on the goals must redouble their efforts while those currently on course must strive to go beyond the goals to meet the challenge of eliminating disparities in children's health, education and development.

Our commitments to children demand that we reach out to those most in need of care and protection - the poorest and the most vulnerable, the exploited and the abused. ■

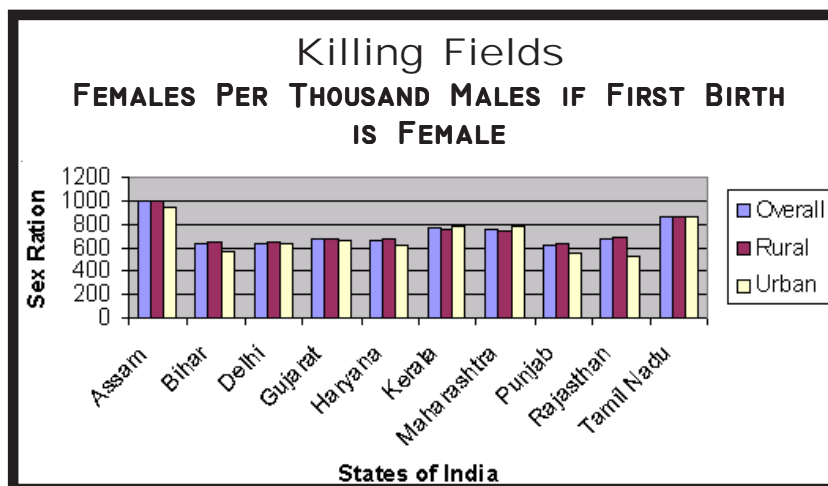
EDUCATION HAS DONE LITTLE TO STOP FEMALE FOETICIDE IN INDIA

By Neelam Raai

If the figure of 10 million missing girls in India wasn't shocking enough, here's more bad news. Literate moms – Class X level or higher – report double the number of missing girls as compared to illiterate mothers, reveals the first-ever systematic study of foeticide published in the latest issue of *Lancet*.

Researchers of the Indo-Canadian team that carried out the study in collaboration with the Registrar-General of India say this indicates cultural preferences for a son, easier access to and greater affordability of pre-natal ultrasound in educated families. This, despite a ban on pre-natal sex-determination tests in place since 1994.

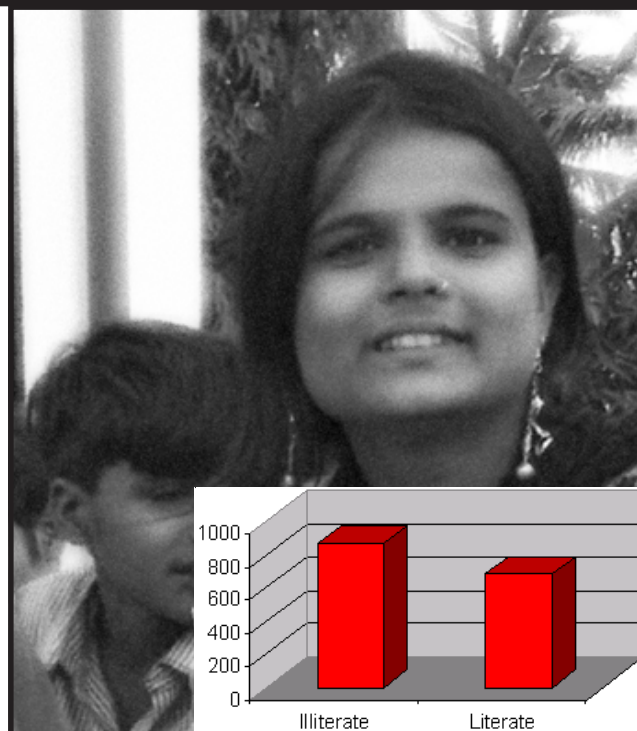
"It's the ultrasound generation. The study shatters the myth created by anecdotal reports that infanticide is the main driver behind the gender gap," says Dr. Prabhat Jha, a core member of the research team who is with the University of Toronto.



are generally better educated and child mortality rates are lower.

In cases where the first child was female, Punjab (614/1000) shows the worst sex

ratio followed by Delhi (631/1000). In both cases, the urban ratio was worse than the rural, though Rajasthan was at the absolute bottom with a shocking 527/1000 when it came to urban households. Interestingly, the data collected from 1.1 million households shows that religion is immaterial when it comes to foeticide. All households, irrespective of their religious affiliation,



According to him, the women most at risk were those who already have one or two female children. "Pressure from society and family comes into play and the numbers clearly reveal this," he says. In Delhi and all other states – with the exception of Assam – the sex ratio is lower when the previous child was female than when it was male. This trend is noted even in states such as Kerala or Tamil Nadu where women

were less likely to have a second female child.

Jha says the demographic impact of a skewed sex ratio in the years to come could result in a situation like China where there are 40 million bachelors. "Increase in cases of HIV, polyandry and abortion-related deaths could be the other effects if corrective action isn't taken," he points out. ■

Times Of India, 13 January 2005