

Challenges to Children's Well-Being in a Globalizing World: A UNICEF Perspective

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Carol Bellamy, the executive director of UNICEF, was honored to be asked to give the Fauri lecture and asked me to tell you how much she regrets not being able to be here. I know that Carol would want you to know how pleased we are that UNICEF can be part of this event to honor Dean Fauri and Mrs. Fauri and to kick off your weekend of special events at the School of Social Work.

Just a few days ago, Carol Bellamy and I attended a meeting of UNICEF field staff from countries affected by emergencies, mostly countries affected by war or conflict of some kind. I think we were all daunted in that meeting by the stories from our colleagues in the field—stories of children being given arms shamelessly and being put in the front lines of battle, of the rape of women and girls being condoned as a tactic of war, and of other discouraging circumstances of children in these countries. But in UNICEF we are not daunted for long, and indeed are continually energized by the success of some governments with which we work who are moving forward in their support for protection of children in the worst of these circumstances. I would like in this talk to speak about another, not unrelated, set of circumstances that seem to us to pose a particular challenge to children—that of globalization in its many guises. So that we are not mired in despair, I would like to say something about how UNICEF and our partners are addressing some of these challenges.

I had not planned to say a great deal about UNICEF as such—I hope you have all heard of the United Nations Children’s Fund before, even if only through “trick or treat for UNICEF.” Founded in 1946, UNICEF’s first preoccupation was with relief services to children and families affected by WWII. Humanitarian relief continues to be a large part of what we support. I think many of my colleagues in UNICEF are proudest of being part of a range of activities that have contributed to the important reduction in child mortality that the world has seen in the last 50 years, although child mortality trends have responded to many factors besides the immunization and other basic services supported by UNICEF through our programs of cooperation with over 150 governments. More recently, UNICEF has taken on the promotion and protection of the human rights of children as a central mission, while still retaining some significant support to basic services around the world.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is in many ways the descendent of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on which much of the work of the UN system is based. The Convention was brought to the General Assembly of the UN about the time of the World Summit for Children in 1990, something of a high watermark for UNICEF’s activities to that point. The CRC is the fastest ratified human rights instrument in history as far as we can tell, with ratification now accomplished in every country of the world but two—Somalia and the U.S. One is compelled to note that Somalia has the pretty good excuse of not having a government.

The provisions of the Convention may be of particular interest to social workers—children have the right to health and education services of high quality, the right to protection from sexual and economic exploitation, including hazardous work, the right not to be conscripted as soldiers. The articulation in Article 24 of the right to the “highest attainable standard of health” has certainly proven to be one of the most challenging for many of the governments with which UNICEF works.

The rapid near universal ratification of the CRC should be a sign that children are in some senses on the political agenda in a way that wasn’t true when UNICEF began its work in the 1940s. I not too long ago heard a talk by Professor Hans Singer of the University of Sussex whose excellent work on global poverty and food insecurity some of you may know. He was a young economist in the new United Nations when UNICEF was founded. When the first executive director of UNICEF went across the street to the UN Secretariat and tried to get some of the economists to help do some analyses of the impact of certain phenomena on children, Dr. Singer said that the first reaction of the UN economic staff was, “No, we work on serious issues.” We don’t get much of that anymore—every politician has something to say about his or her support for children—and yet it is clear that it will be a long time before anyone can rest easy about the rights of children.

Globalization is a word that has cropped up more and more frequently in Carol Bellamy’s public statements as she is asked to talk about threats to the fulfillment of children’s rights. UNICEF has, for example, watched with the rest of the world as the well documented gains made in children’s health and nutrition in East Asia have

quickly eroded or been seriously threatened in recent months, as ever more powerful private sector interests such as tobacco companies have seemed to target children, as the minimum needs of workers, including child workers, become easier to ignore. I am not an expert in globalization, and I probably err on the side of thinking that pretty much everything can be lumped under this term. Let me try, however, to summarize some of the analysis that has been particularly striking to us in UNICEF as we attempt to keep our attention on children's rights in the rapid change of globalization. We have been helped in particular by the work of Professor Frances Stewart of Oxford University, Kevin Watkins of OXFAM-UK and others working with the UN Development Program to understand the relationship between globalization and human development. I am sure there are more rigorous definitions of this term, but this is one that UNDP uses and that might fit our purposes—integration to a single global market, including removal of barriers to trade, expansion of capital flows, the international spread of cultures and information, and the expansion of technologies that facilitate these flows.

While it is clear that these phenomena offer enormous opportunities, economic and otherwise, we are persuaded by the evidence that rising inequalities between rich and poor countries and between the rich and poor within countries are a significant feature of globalization. And this is for many reasons, including, as Kevin Watkins points out, poor education, infrastructure, and many other factors that do not allow the poorest groups and regions to participate in markets on equitable terms. The United Nations Development Program estimates that developing countries as a whole will lose something on the order of \$500 billion a year in the foreseeable future from unequal terms of trade—a sum considerably in excess of the foreign aid they receive. What UNDP calls the least developed countries—those lowest in per-capita income, largely in Sub-Saharan Africa—are already extremely disadvantaged as their share of global trade is not nearly commensurate with the size of their populations. Foreign direct investment (FDI), which now seems to have great currency as the indicator of choice of well-being of economies, is already obviously skewed to the countries most able to manage the global economy and is likely to become more so.

The rise in incomes in the industrialized world has been historically great and rapid in the last 50 years, which has brought many opportunities, but it is the increasing disparity of incomes and of opportunities to enjoy the benefits of globalization that remains of concern. There are many ways to represent global income disparities, but I find very striking the figure that the net worth of the world's 358 billionaires (that's 358 individuals) is the same as that of the poorest 2.5 billion people in the world. We know that it is children who suffer most from poverty—because without access to basic services, they can easily die or suffer disabilities that will affect them for life, and because they are so often powerless to resist the exploitation that comes hand in hand with poverty. We can represent the global poverty of children in a number of ways—40% living where per capita income is \$1/day or less, 11.3 million still dying of preventable causes every year, 140 million school-aged children not in school (of which 60% are girls), hundreds of millions without adequate sanitation.

I risk taking perhaps too great a leap here, but the striking increase in the number of civil conflicts and other crises that have required a humanitarian response from agencies like ours seems also to be part of this phenomenon of increasing disparities, superimposed upon the phenomenon of a virtually unfettered arms industry. As more and more conflicts have their roots in poverty and inequality, there seem also to be more and more protracted conflicts—especially important for children in a variety of ways.

Without putting too fine a point on the links with any strictly defined phenomenon of globalization, I would simply like to focus a bit more on three phenomena with various links to the globalizing world that represent particular challenges to the well-being of children: child labor, which is growing in the context of increasing disrespect for occupational safety and other labor standards; situations of conflict, especially protracted conflict; predatory activities of multinational firms, and in this case I would like to take the example of the infant foods industry briefly.

It is perhaps risky to suggest that there has been an increase in child labor with globalization since child labor statistics are notoriously unreliable, but by the best estimates of UNICEF and the International Labor Office (ILO), about one in four school-aged children in developing countries are regular workers. ILO estimates that for

many of these children, the hours are very long indeed, with about half of them working at least 6 days a week and well over half working at least 9 hours a day. Figures about child labor are unreliable because of the kind of work we're talking about—domestic workers and family laborers perhaps being the least visible, street children and sex workers being somewhat more visible but not always easier to count, child soldiers being an example of children in an especially hazardous profession.

I won't try to recount the horrors of child labor that our work with ILO has uncovered—many of these stories are well known. UNICEF's "State of the World's Children" report in 1997 tells some of these stories in detail. It is striking to note the situation of children in bonded labor, for example, very common in parts of Asia, where children work to pay off a loan to their family and children's labor is seen by families as a possible way out of a cycle of poverty that may have plagued them for generations. There are many facets of this problem of child labor that make it an enormous program challenge for UNICEF. One is, of course, that not all child labor is exploitative or harmful, and some child labor is extremely important to the well-being of families. Some of you may remember that Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa introduced into the Congress in 1992 a bill that would have prohibited the importation to the U.S. of products made by children under the age of 15. Even the prospect of this bill so panicked the garment industry in Bangladesh, which was exporting the bulk of its product to the U.S. at the time, that children, mostly girls, were abruptly dismissed in great numbers. Many of these girls wound up having to turn to much less lucrative and safe work or became prostitutes. All of us who have worked in developing countries know the phenomenon of the child domestic worker, usually a girl, who is handed over by a poor rural family to provide domestic help for a wealthier urban family in exchange for some kind of shelter and meals usually of leftovers. The untold stories of sexual exploitation and beating of these workers are myriad. A study of these girls in Haiti recently showed that, among other problems, they are shorter and more underweight than other local children.

How then is the problem of child labor to be dealt with? Among the strategies UNICEF has supported are bringing education programs to the workplaces of children; improving general education systems so that parents will have more confidence in them and want to keep their children in school, creating less hazardous income-generating opportunities for children that are compatible with education, assisting governments in establishing legislation to protect children from hazardous work, improving access to credit for the poor to reduce the motivation for bonded child labor, and working directly with employers to develop more responsible policies toward child workers. Most of these programs are expensive. They require mobilization of policy makers and communities and especially an honest recognition of the problem, which is not easy to achieve in many places. But there are more and more victories and more and more examples of successful programs, and this is an issue that grabs the public conscience of the Western world not to a great enough degree, but at least to some degree. The participation of trade unions from Western countries in some of this work has resulted in additional support.

The problems of children caught in situations of conflict are yet another sad part of today's world, as I mentioned before. While children are truly innocent victims of the catastrophes that result from a society in conflict, "donor fatigue" is so great around humanitarian emergencies that it seems even the horrible exploitation and violence visited upon children in these situations doesn't always inspire great sympathy or support for programs. The ways in which UNICEF is concerned about children being affected by conflict are: recruitment of children as soldiers, the high risk of rape and abuse in situations of conflict and social breakdown, separation from parents and caregivers, the breakdown of basic services that always hits children hardest, the threat of landmines, the lasting damage of psychological trauma, and of course nutritional deprivation.

Child soldiers constitute a particular concern. Desmond Tutu has said, "It is immoral that adults should want children to fight their wars for them. . . . There is simply no excuse, no acceptable argument for arming children." And yet we estimate that more than 300,000 children under 18 are currently part of armies around the world. A closer look at this phenomenon by UNICEF, the Save the Children Foundation, and other partners, has revealed the horror of the practice, a practice which would not even be possible on this scale but for the convenient technological innovation and global proliferation of semi-automatic rifles like the AK-47 that are relatively cheap,

lightweight, and simple enough to be stripped and reassembled by a child of 10. With conflicts of protracted duration, children are sought as fighters when older soldiers are depleted. Children are more obedient and they are easier to manipulate using drugs and alcohol. They are sometimes perceived to be expendable and thus ideal for particularly dangerous jobs such as being in the front lines when an army approaches a stretch of earth laced with landmines. It is not surprising that child soldiers are likely to be from families that are the poorest and most marginalized in other ways—again, this is child labor, and of the most hazardous sort.

Landmines are on our list as well—are children more affected by them than adults? Of course, not only because they run and play without the caution of adults but also because they are less likely to survive the loss of a limb. Some 100 million land mines lie unexploded in 75 countries. The anti-personnel mines can be exploded by the touch of a small child's foot. The horror of landmines is finally getting more and more public attention. Just last week, the UN celebrated the 40th country to ratify the anti-personnel landmine ban—40 is the minimum necessary for the landmine convention signed by 122 countries in Ottawa last December to become binding international law. This ban will go into effect in March. This ban will cover the production, sale, stockpiling, export, and transfer of mines that are designed to kill or maim. Great credit for this success goes to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, a non-governmental organization that received last year's Nobel Peace Prize for their commitment and perseverance in generating a groundswell of support for the treaty.

What can we do to protect children in war? Obviously and first of all, we should continue to work to prevent conflict in the first place. Beyond that, UNICEF and other agencies are working more systematically into our programs some explicit protections for girls and women from rape and other violence and abuse—not always easy or effective. Several agencies are working on the demobilization of child soldiers and their reintegration into society. Acts of violence against children in war need to be understood as war crimes of the highest order. Economic and trade sanctions, which are easy enough to put in place, need to be understood clearly for their impact on children. The social work profession certainly has a role to play in helping to shore up the capacity for providing trauma-related services to children who have suffered the horrors of conflict.

The third area on which I would like to comment is the protection of children in the face of the increasing power of multi-national corporations. For this we can turn to the example of breastfeeding, a program focus that UNICEF and WHO have long had as a priority and that has become much more complicated since the definitive discovery some years ago that the HIV virus is passed through breast milk. Aside from that circumstance, however, we have known for a long time of the amazing benefits of breastfeeding, not only for children in developing countries of whom WHO estimates about 1.5 million die every year largely because they are not breastfed, but also for children in rich countries, who have fewer ear infections, apparently better intellectual performance in later life, and all sorts of other benefits if they are breastfed. Indeed, the American Academy of Pediatrics, a professional association in the U.S. that has accepted infant formula industry money in the past, still in its journal *Pediatrics* last December issued a statement that took as its first premise that breastfeeding is every bit as important for children in the U.S. as for children anywhere else in the world.

Nonetheless, powerful forces militate against breastfeeding, notably those in the infant foods industry. Nestle alone as an economic entity is bigger than Thailand—this is a powerful industry that grows more powerful with the economic liberalization of our times. When I first lived in Africa in the late 1970s, some companies still had the practice of dressing up its sales agents like nurses or doctors to tell women in villages and towns why their product was better for children than breast milk. Today the tactics are somewhat more subtle, but unethical marketing of breast milk substitutes is widespread.

In 1981, the World Health Assembly of WHO approved, and 191 member states endorsed, an international minimum standard called the “International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes.” The Code was agreed to by the infant formula industry, which vowed voluntary compliance even in countries where laws implementing the Code had not yet been promulgated. The code's provisions are clear and wide-ranging—no direct promotion to the public; no free samples to pregnant women, new mothers or health workers; and no false claims about the superiority of formula over breastfeeding. Some 17 years later, in spite of the best efforts of many organizations,

the abuses continue. As just one recent and well-documented example, in a report of a study in four countries undertaken by some independent monitors convened by the Bishop of Coventry of the Church of England, it was found that the practices of providing women in maternity hospitals and health workers with free samples of formula remain widespread. (A peer-reviewed version of this study was published by Anna Taylor in the *British Medical Journal* of 11 April 1998.) The encouraging thing about this study is that in Bangladesh, a country with one of the best Code-related laws in the world, the abuses were controlled. The International Code is an instrument that works.

Another is the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI), a WHO/UNICEF program that now involves 14,000 maternity hospitals around the world. Through this program, hospital staff receive training that enables them to make their facilities places where breastfeeding can have a good start through a series of practices, including ensuring that newborns can stay with their mothers at all times, and mothers with questions or concerns about breastfeeding can get support and complete information. In addition, support groups for new mothers help them beyond their hospital stay. Among the benefits of this program are increased rates of initiation of breastfeeding and decreased rates of diarrhea among infants in the catchment areas of Baby-Friendly Hospitals. This year's "State of the World's Children" report by UNICEF details some successes of this life-saving program.

Are we then optimistic about protecting children in a globalizing world? There is much success on which to build and much more we can do. But let me go back to a point made earlier about foreign direct investment or rather private capital flows more generally versus foreign assistance from government to government. Private capital is flowing more abundantly into certain regions and countries—some Asian countries, in spite of the recent problems in East Asia, will continue to be big winners. But Africa and the poorest countries and communities of South Asia will not in the foreseeable future enjoy such flows. Sub-Saharan Africa is a region left behind by globalization and thus increasingly dependent on foreign aid at a time when foreign aid seems to be in a virtual free-fall as a percentage of national budgets of wealthy countries.

A target of 0.7% was set some years ago by the donor countries as a goal for the minimum percentage of their budgets to be devoted to assistance to developing countries. How have they done in reaching this goal? Some of you may be aware of the survey that was conducted by the University of Maryland five or six years ago in which Americans were asked what they thought a reasonable percentage of our national budget would be to devote to foreign assistance to poorer countries. The average suggested by those interviewed was about 5%. Then the same respondents were asked what they thought the actual percentage was that was allocated to foreign aid—and most people said "at least 10%." The reality, as I think many of you know, is that the U.S. has not for years come even near the 0.7% goal. Indeed, not many countries have—only the Nordic countries and the Netherlands. Only 0.08% of the United States' \$1.7 trillion budget for fiscal 1998 will be devoted to foreign assistance. The question is what behavior is becoming to a superpower and to rich countries in general in a globalizing world? Without a change in these numbers, the important work that UNICEF and our partner agencies and governments can do in the poorest countries will be sorely limited.

Yesterday, after he was honored by the U.S. Congress with the Congressional Gold Medal, President Nelson Mandela of South Africa said that he thought a true partnership between Africa and the rich world would include such elements as fairer terms of trade for poor countries, some measure of debt relief for the poorest countries, and increased flows of appropriate kinds of aid. This sounds to me like a formula for a more child-friendly world. Professor Hans Singer's observation about the political importance of children 50 years ago really is telling. The elevated place of children on the global political agenda is something that could not have been imagined 50 years ago. As Carol Bellamy has said, children in need were seen as they had been through much of history, as objects of charity, not as legitimate claimants of rights whose well-being is on a par with any of the great political concerns of the age. In this 50th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the world seems to be coming to an understanding that the well-being of children and the fulfillment of their rights and the rights of women are not only moral and ethical imperatives but are key determinants of the political and economic future

of all societies. I congratulate you on the work you do with children and what you do to educate a corps of professionals who will help keep children high on the political agenda. Thank you.

About Joanne M. Csete

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She worked on nutrition programs for eight years in Rwanda, Burundi, and the former Zaire and has since worked on nutrition program evaluation and design in over thirty countries around the world. She has done emergency work in nutrition in the Great Lakes Countries of Central Africa, as well as in Sierra Leone and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

She was on the faculties of Nutritional Sciences and Development Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison for five years. She holds a bachelor’s degree in economics from Princeton University, a master’s degree in public health from Columbia University, and a doctorate in international nutrition from Cornell University.