

Global Drive for Healthcare and Nutrition to Children

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Abstract

The prosperity and progress of a country depends on the quality of its citizens and it is in childhood need a conducive and congenial environment to develop into good citizens. They need to be properly clothed, adequately fed and carefully protected against various odds that inhibit their growth. Children are the most vulnerable section of society, whose development is threatened by several dangers including disease, ignorance, material want and social and economic intrigue. It cannot be denied that the children have been one of the most neglected and exploited class of human beings. The concepts of health, disease and treatment are related to the social structure of communities. Primary health care, is essential health care made available to all individuals and families in the community, and especially to children. International organisations can play different, though not mutually exclusive, roles in world politics and they can be used by States as instruments of foreign policy in accordance with the traditional state-centric view, it is a platform for discussions of regional problem to unite the countries together for one common objective to maintain peace and security. Several International Covenants, Conventions, Summits, Protocols etc. have taken place to patently or latently deal with healthcare and nutrition issues of children at international and national level. Though these Global efforts have played a very important role in this regard but still a lot of work is to be done for providing proper healthcare and nutrition to children in our country.

Keywords: Childhood, Growth, Disease, Healthcare, Nutrition.

Introduction

Historically, the rights and status of children depended solely on the customs, traditions and laws of the countries they belonged to. There had been no internationally recognised legal basis for establishing or protecting their rights. Today, whole scenario stands changed. The prosperity and progress of a country depends on the quality of its citizens and it is in childhood need a conducive and congenial environment to develop into good citizens. They need to be properly clothed, adequately fed and carefully protected against various odds that inhibit their growth. Recognizing the importance of children as the future hope for the world, the international community has begun to advocate the cause of the welfare of children.^{1,2}

Child Welfare

Children are the most vulnerable section of society, whose development is threatened by several dangers including disease, ignorance, material want and social and economic intrigue. It cannot be denied that the children have been one of the most neglected and exploited class of human beings. The child has for centuries been treated as personal possession and not as a national resource.³ Sight of small children begging on the road side, near cinema halls or busy railways stations and bus stands, etc., or carrying bricks on their hands at brick-kilns and around construction sites or dusting cars using their ragged clothes or dusters or sitting on pavements with shoe-shine kits is not uncommon. If we visit a tea shop or a dhaba for taking tea or meals, we will be received by a small, desperate, frail, pale and shabbily clothed child of tender age. Millions of children, all over the world are denied the pleasures of the childhood. Childhood is universal transcend all nationalities and know no artificial boundaries. Family as the fundamental group of society plays significant role in nurturing children and it shall provide the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children.⁴ The concepts of health, disease and treatment are related to the social structure of communities. Every culture, irrespective of its simplicity or complexity, has its own system of beliefs and practices concerning health and disease and has also evolved its own system of treatment to combat disease.⁵

Primary health care, that is essential health care made available to all individuals and families in the community, and especially to children. Extension of the benefits of health services to all individuals subject to the State's jurisdiction. Universal immunization against the principal infectious diseases, prevention and treatment of endemic, occupational and other diseases, education of the population on the prevention and treatment of health problems, etc. also necessary. Satisfaction of the health needs of the highest risk groups and those whose poverty make them the most vulnerable.⁶

International Organisations

International organisations can play different, though not mutually exclusive roles in world politics. They can be used by States as instruments of foreign policy in accordance with the traditional state-centric view. The right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health of children is enshrined by various international organizations.

The United Nations Organization (UN)

It is an intergovernmental organization established on 24 October 1945 to promote international co-operation. Its objectives include maintaining international peace and security, promoting human rights, fostering social and economic development, protecting the environment, and providing humanitarian aid in cases of famine, natural disaster, and armed conflict.

Article 55 lays down that "With a view to the creation of conditions of stability and well-being which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, the United Nations shall promote: (a) higher standards of living, full employment and conditions of economic and social progress and development; (b) solutions of international economic, social, health and related problems and international cultural and educational co-operation.

International Labour Organization (ILO), 1919

This was established to promote programme to achieve full employment and raise standard of living. It also protects many basic human rights. It endeavours to implement the principles of its Constitution by laying down standards to achieve ILO objective.⁷ The progress of any society would come to a grinding halt if the children of that society are not given equal opportunities and protection, irrespective of the families they come from to develop themselves. Millions of children have been deprived of their basic rights simply because they are poor and are compelled to take up unhealthy and hazards jobs to make the both ends meet. Many talented and innovative brains cannot blossom fully since the society is unable to provide education, health care, etc. to them.⁸

International legislation and discussions on child labour have very important role in influencing national policies and shaping global understanding of the issue. The main causes of child labour include poverty, unemployment, and excess population.⁹ About the health of child workers, it is shown that there is a close relationship between malnutrition, lack of sleep and hence fatigue, which leads to a reduced working capacity. The working environment is

generally harmful to the physical health and mental well-being of the children. Equipment and machinery which they have to handle are designed for adults and these may cause serious injuries to children.¹⁰ The health status of individuals and populations is a significant barometer of social progress, broadly reflecting the sustainability of current, and prospective, forms of how we order our lives both locally and globally.¹¹

Safety and Health at Work

The safety and health conditions at work are very different between countries, economic sectors and social groups. Deaths and injuries take a particularly heavy toll in developing countries, where a large part of the population is engaged in hazardous activities, such as agriculture, fishing and mining. Throughout the world, the poorest and least protected - often women, children and migrants among are most affected.¹²

Maternity Protection

Raising a family is a cherished goal for many working people. Yet pregnancy and maternity are an especially vulnerable time for working women and their families. Expectant and nursing mothers require special protection to prevent harm to their or their infants' health, and they need adequate time to give birth, to recover, and to nurse their children. At the same time, they also require protection to ensure that they will not lose their job simply because of pregnancy or maternity leave. Such protection not only ensures a woman's equal access to employment, it also ensures the continuation of often vital income which is necessary for the well-being of her entire family.¹³ The social and cultural factors deny girls and women the same nutrition, healthcare and other support that males receive. This disparity leads to a power imbalance between genders with women having an inferior status.¹⁴

The Hague Global Child Labour Conference - 10-11 May 2010

While the global movement has achieved much progress in reducing the incidence of child labour, efforts must be stepped up if we are to deliver the commitment of a world free of the worst forms of child labour by 2016. In order to meet that challenge, the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, in close collaboration with the ILO (and in cooperation with UNICEF and the World Bank), is organizing a global conference on child labour to be held in The Hague (The Netherlands) on 10 and 11 May 2010. The conference objectives are: to achieve rapidly universal ratification of ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and 182; to deliver the commitment to take immediate and effective measures to end the worst forms of child labour as a matter of urgency; and to agree on significantly intensified efforts to reach the 2016 goal laid down in the Global Action Plan.¹⁵

Improving the standards of living and labour standards for workers or eradicating child labour is what matters it is the right cause for humankind, a cause to fight for, through various approaches and by using all the mechanisms at our disposal in order to ensure its success. It is a universal issue, the solutions to which should be found by all nations taking into account equity considerations.¹⁶

The Indian legislature has duly kept in view the welfare of children in the matters of their employment. The laws deal with the three major aspects- minimum age of employment, prohibition of night work and medical examination of children. The laws, however, are deficient from the international standards as laid down by the ILO. The process of implementation of the international standards will have to be gradual one keeping in view the economic conditions of the country. International Labour Organisation (ILO) from time to time has given important guidelines to tackle the problem of child labour.¹⁷

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 1945

It is an agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger. Serving both developed and developing countries, FAO acts as a neutral forum where all nations meet as equals to negotiate agreements and debate policy. FAO is also a source of knowledge and information, and helps developing countries and countries in transition modernize and improve agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices, ensuring good nutrition and food security for all.¹⁸

The FAO coordinates the efforts of governments and technical agencies in programs for developing agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and land and water resources. It also carries out research; provides technical assistance on projects in individual countries; operates educational programs through seminars and training centres; maintains information and support services, including keeping statistics on world production, trade, and consumption of agricultural commodities; and publishes a number of periodicals, yearbooks, and research bulletins.

The main objective of FAO is to raise the living standards of the peoples of the world. Its functions are to collect, analyse, interpret and disseminate information relating to nutrition, food and agriculture, to promote international action with respect to research, the improvement of education and administration relating to nutrition, food and agriculture, the conservation of natural resources, improvements of agricultural production, marketing and distribution, the adoption of policies for credit and agricultural commodity agreements, to furnish technical assistance to organise expert missions and generally to contribute to the raising of standards of nutrition and of living and ensuring humanity's freedom from hunger.¹⁹

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), 1946

It is a United Nations Program and this fund was created to provide emergency food and healthcare to children in countries. It became a permanent part of a United Nations System and its name was shortened from the original United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund.²⁰

Its Objective

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is a group that is committed to improving the lives of children all around the world. It is a charity group that is a part of the United Nations and the main purpose is to make sure that children around the entire world get the care and education they need to grow up to be

happy and healthy adults. It believes that children require special kinds of care and affection. If children don't receive good care, it can harm them forever. It treats all children equally and doesn't matter what religion, nationality, race, or gender a child is. It talks to different countries' government leaders and asks them to support the children in their country and to value their rights.

Working/Position of UNICEF in India

UNICEF has been working in India since 1949. The largest UN Organization in the country and it is fully committed to working with the Government of India to ensure that each child born in this vast and complex country gets the best start in life, thrives and develops to his or her full potential.²¹ One of UNICEF's leading priorities across the world is to ensure that every child has the best possible start to life- a safe birth, sound new-born care and good nutrition.

The reason for high rate of infant mortality is closely tied up with the equally high rate of maternal deaths: few women have access to skilled birth attendants, fewer still to quality, emergency obstetric care. For those infants who do survive, the prevalence of early childhood illnesses poses a serious threat to their growth and development. Many children die every year from preventable infections including measles and tetanus. In addition is the problem of malnutrition, which severely affects a child's capacity to learn and grow. Although one of the major causes for malnutrition is inadequate food intake, it is influenced by other factors too. The availability of health services and access to them, the availability of care for the child and the pregnant women, the quality of that care, whether acceptable hygiene practices are followed or not are important contributing factors. Inadequate care of these women already underdeveloped, especially during pregnancy, leads them in turn to deliver underweight babies who are vulnerable to further malnutrition and disease. In addition is the widespread prevalence of anemia amongst children under three and of Vitamin A and iodine deficiencies. UNICEF supports the national reproductive and child health programme in its aim to reduce maternal, neonatal and child mortality. In partnership with the government, it aims to improve overall immunisation coverage, raise awareness of the indispensable role played by routine immunisation in protecting a community's health, improve the quality of emergency obstetric care and promote an integrated management of early childhood illnesses and also supports the government in its strategies to reduce and prevent malnutrition.²²

World Health Organization (WHO), 1948

The World Health Organization²³ is a specialized agency of the United Nation, acting as a coordinating authority of international public health. Health is a global, national and individual concern and is the subject of intensive international cooperation, coordinated in particular by WHO. The Preamble of the Constitution of the WHO states that the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without of distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition and adds that healthy development of the child is of basic importance, the

ability to live harmoniously in a changing total environment is essential to such development.²⁴ The WHO is to raise the standard of health of the peoples of the world. Here, health means that state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. It is not confined to absence of diseases or physical infirmity. To seek its objectives, it assists State Governments to strengthen their health services and to give them technical assistance and advice in emergency. It plans to eradicate diseases and for this purpose, proposes International Conventions and agreements on health.²⁵

Role of WHO

The role of WHO's at the global, regional and country levels is that of a catalyst in collaboration with other agencies like UNICEF. The WHO is leading a worldwide campaign to provide effective immunization for all children to prevent the six major infectious diseases of childhood diphtheria, measles, polio, tetanus, TB and whooping cough and it has collaborating with India in providing and developing health care facilities and India makes regular annual contribution to it.²⁶

Its Objectives

WHO fulfills its objectives through its core functions:²⁷ providing leadership on matters critical to health and engaging in partnerships where joint action is needed; shaping the research agenda and stimulating the generation, translation and dissemination of valuable knowledge; setting norms and standards and promoting and monitoring their implementation; articulating ethical and evidence-based policy options; providing technical support, catalysing change, and building sustainable institutional capacity; and monitoring the health situation and assessing health trends.²⁸

World Food Programme (WFP), 1961

It is the food assistance branch of the United Nations and the world's largest humanitarian organization addressing hunger and promoting food security. It is a member of the United Nations Development Group and part of its Executive Committee.²⁹

Regional Organisation

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), 1985

It is an economic and geopolitical cooperation among eight member nations³⁰ that are primarily located in South Asia continent. The SAARC policies aim to promote welfare economics, collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia, and to accelerate socio-cultural development in the region.

Declarations, Conventions and Protocols

Geneva Declaration of the Rights of Child, 1924

The century before the Universal Declaration saw immense advances in pre-natal as well as post-natal care for the child. By the present Declaration of the Rights of Child, commonly known as "Declaration of Geneva"³¹ man and women of all nations recognizing that mankind owes to the child the best that it has to give, declare and accept it as their duty that, beyond and above all considerations of race nationality or creed.³²

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

This as a common standard of achievement for all people's and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance both among the people of member states themselves and among the people of territories under their jurisdiction.³³

European Convention on Human Rights, 1950

The Convention adopts the term 'everyone' and children have successfully brought cases either on their own behalf or as co-applicants with their parents. It has thus been used as a valuable instrument for children. The Council of Europe has also adopted the European Social Charter 1961 and this contains a number of specific references to children. Part 1 enshrines the basic principle as 'Children and young persons have the right to special protection against the physical and moral hazards to which they are exposed.'³⁴

United Nation Declaration of Rights of Child, 1959

The spirit of the Declaration³⁵ was reflected in the preamble which said "mankind owes to the child the best it has to give". The Declaration affirms the right of the child to enjoy special protection and facilities to develop in a healthy and normal manner in conditions of freedom and dignity, to have a name and nationality, social security, adequate nutrition, medical services, to grow up in an atmosphere of affection, to receive education, protection from exploitation.³⁶

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provided the basis for the formulation by the United Nations of Covenant and conventions, declarations and recommendations on specific aspects. The two broad sets of Human Rights affirmed in the Universal Declaration- economic, social and cultural rights and civil and political rights were elaborated and divided into two covenants- the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*³⁷ and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*.³⁸ These are the fundamental documents which lay the basis for the protection and promotion of human rights throughout the world.³⁹

The Covenant contains some of the most significant international legal provisions establishing economic, social and cultural rights, including rights relating to work in just and favourable conditions, to social protection, to an adequate standard of living, to the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health.⁴⁰

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966

The preamble to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights expressly lists civil and political rights that "derive from the inherent dignity of the human person". The "idea of the free human beings enjoying civil and political freedom and freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his civil and political rights, as well as his economic,

social and cultural rights."⁴¹ The Human Rights Committee operating under the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights has stressed that human right to health in its wide dimensions, as the 'supreme right of the human being', requires positive measures on the part of States.⁴²

International Year of Child, 1979

Children were not regarded entities with distinct interests and attitudes and were taken for granted. Children were not recognized on their own rights and were looked upon as properties that could be handled in any way. They were taken as merely the members of the family not of the society as a whole. They had to suffer or enjoy their lives according to the status and conditions of their parents. The year 1979 was designed as International Year of the Child (IYC).⁴³

Convention on the Rights of Child, 1989

The need to ensure that the children were treated humanely was being felt by right thinking people for a long time. Particular needs of the children were not addressed specifically in the human rights instruments. Recognising the fact that the children are vulnerable to various forms of abuse, malnutrition, exploitation, diseases, etc., and based on the broad consensus on the rights to which children are entitled. This convention, for the first time brought together in one document, a statement of the rights of the Child, which were scattered in many human rights instruments. It helped in placing the needs of the child high on the national and international political agenda.⁴⁴

World Summit for Children, 1990

The idea of World Summit for Children when first mooted was regarded by many of those consulted both inside and outside of UNICEF as ambitious, audacious and unrealistic- a typical Grant pipe-dream. The Summit also set an agenda for UNICEF's country-level activities over the forthcoming decade.⁴⁵

The Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, 2002

This Protocol draws special attention to the criminalization of these serious violations of children's rights and emphasizes the importance of fostering increased public awareness and international cooperation in efforts to combat them. The Optional Protocols must always be interpreted in light of the original treaty as a whole, in this case guided by the principles of non-discrimination, best interests of the child and child participation.⁴⁶

Concluding Remarks

Child care and welfare, traditionally the exclusive responsibility of family and kin, are now shared with the State in an increasing number of countries. Obligations for child's care and welfare are being less left to traditional precept and custom and increasingly placed under larger legal scrutiny and social legislation. This is shown by the ways in which nations have established norms and regulations for child welfare, without unduly encroaching upon the independence and privacy of individual and familial rights.⁴⁷

The significance and importance of the child lies in the fact that the child is universe and if there was no child, there would be no humanity and there cannot be human civilization without humanity.

Therefore, human being owes to the child the best that it has to be given. If there is no proper growth of child today, the future of the nation will be in dark. It is thus an obligation of every generation to bring up child in proper way. If a child goes wrong for want of proper attention, training and guidance, it will indeed be a curse on the society. Every society must, therefore, devote full attention to ensure that children are properly brought up in a proper atmosphere in order that they may be able to have their rightful place in society in future.⁴⁸

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