

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CHILD WELFARE

BY MRS. LILA ALVARES.

"The problem of children in most Asian and other underdeveloped countries is mainly one of rescue from the circumstances of poverty and malnutrition, of low standard of living, of overcrowding and illiteracy, of endemic disease and attendant social and psychological handicaps." says Mrs. Alvares and reviews, against this background, the International Conference on Child Welfare, held in Bombay in December last. In the following article, she points out that the western clinical approach to child welfare will not suit India and makes a plea for broad nation-wide welfare programmes for children in India.

Mrs. Alvares is an alumnus (1942-'44) of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

That 'mankind owes to the child the best that it has to give' is a concept of responsibility that most governments have accepted, and in the scheme of social services the section on Child Welfare is given increasing emphasis. In most countries, larger and larger budgetary provisions are being made for child welfare, and voluntary agencies are encouraged to interest themselves in this humanitarian task.

The place of the Child in society has unfortunately taken on two different aspects in different countries. While in some the question is approached from the humanitarian point of view, and care and development of the child is just an expression of the larger responsibilities towards the human race with full freedom to develop, in other countries the question of child welfare is distorted and finds expression in attempts to mould the whole mental outlook of the child in the philosophy of the State. Whereas the attempt in one set of countries is to afford the child the care and protection it lacks and to train it for free citizenship, in the other set, while care and protection are undoubtedly there, the perspective of development in the ideas of freedom and citizenship is absent. A change in perspective can destroy all conceptions of child welfare.

The International Conference Session.—It is in this context that the first International Conference on Child Welfare met in Bombay from 5th to the 12th December, 1952, under the patronage of the Government of India. It was convened by the International Union

for Child Welfare, in co-operation with the Indian Council for Child Welfare, and was attended by delegates from over 48 countries, the U.N. and specialised Organisations, and by a large number of observers.

The Conference itself lasted for seven days; and to facilitate deliberations on the various aspects of Child Welfare, it divided itself into discussion groups, the delegates and observers attaching themselves to the group in which they had specialised or were interested.

There were 9 groups in all, each one concentrating upon a particular issue.

- Group 1: The physical care of the Child in the family.
- „ 2: Child development and the basic principles of education in the home.
- „ 3: The role of health workers and health services in relation to the education of parents.
- „ 4: The contribution of educational services and organisations towards the education of parents and the improvement of child welfare.
- „ 5: The importance of the prevention and the early detection and treatment of handicapped children.
- „ 6: The main problems of the care and education of orthopedically handicapped children in Asian Countries.

- „ 7: The main problems of the care and education of blind children in Asian Countries.
- „ 8: The main problems of the care and education of deaf children in Asian Countries.
- „ 9: The main problems of the care and education of the mentally handicapped children.

Papers were read on many of the above subjects as well as on general problems of child welfare and on the efforts being made in the direction of their solution in many countries. On the basis of these group discussions the Conference:

- I. Reaffirmed its belief in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, commonly known as the Declaration of Geneva, and called upon all Governments to enact appropriate legislation to protect and guarantee such rights.
- II. Urged that, in order to implement the principles outlined in this Declaration:—
 - (a) All countries concerned should do everything they could to preserve and strengthen family life, since a happy home is essential to the greatest growth and development of every child.
 - (b) Each individual child be given the opportunity to become self-reliant and learn the principles of co-operation, so that, in due course, he would recognise and assume his responsibility as an adult and play his part in the community.
 - (c) Social agencies and programmes, voluntary and governmental, be increasingly planned, not only to fully develop the normal child, but also to rebuild and rehabilitate

the socially or physically handicapped.

- (d) Free elementary education be provided for all children and made compulsory as soon as possible. The Conference recognised that voluntary agencies might have to supplement governmental effort in this regard until such time as Governments could take over the complete responsibility of financing free education for all children. The Conference, however, felt that it was the responsibility, ultimately, of Governments to provide education for the children of their countries.

- III. The Conference emphasised the necessity of voluntary effort in furnishing the necessary services for the children of each country. In many countries, certain services, which will ultimately be the responsibility of Governments, must in the interim period be initiated and carried on by voluntary groups.
- IV. Even in countries, where Governments have been able to take an increasing responsibility for some of the fundamental services for children, the Conference maintained that voluntary agencies would always be essential. Individual citizens find their social expression for service through these voluntary organisations and can thus constantly pioneer to meet new needs and develop new methods of meeting such needs.
- V. The Conference recognised the value of establishing centres of specialised training for individuals dealing with children. In addition to increasing the number of professional full-time workers, the Conference stressed the importance of further training facili-

ties for the semi-trained, the part-time and the voluntary workers.

- VI. The Conference, realising the need for co-ordination and co-operation between the many voluntary agencies on the one hand, and between government effort and voluntary effort on the other hand, recommended that methods for attaining these objectives should receive careful study in each country. It further urged the setting up of suitable machinery, where necessary, at national, state and local levels, to achieve these ends.

The Conference also adopted the following resolutions:

"The International Study Conference on Child Welfare, grateful for the opportunities to get better informed and to make these new contacts which were offered by the International Union for Child Welfare and the Indian Council for Child Welfare in convening this meeting

Convinced that such meetings, on the one hand, act as a valuable and effective stimulant both for individuals and for institutions actively interested in Child Welfare and, on the other hand, promote the development of true international co-operation,

Expresses the wish

- (a) that the International Union and the Indian Council for Child Welfare, as conveners of the present Conference and in co-operation with delegates present, ensure that the work of this Conference and specially its findings, be brought to the attention of all those who are in a position to implement them;
- (b) that the International Union for Child Welfare, the Indian Council

for Child Welfare and representatives of other national Organisations be formed into a Continuation Committee, the role of which shall be;

- (i) to maintain and develop the contacts already established;
- (ii) to keep a watching brief over the implementation of the findings;
- (iii) to consider how countries can be of assistance to each other through the loan of single workers or teams, or other means;
- (iv) to convene from time to time regional study conferences; and
- (v) to convene in due course a second international study conference in another Asian country.

As an introduction to the findings concerning handicapped children, it adopted the following statement:

"Recognising that children are the greatest of the world's resources;

That many of the world's children, although physically handicapped, have far more ability than disability;

That these children with integrated medical, educational and other services, can develop those abilities and become more adequate citizens not only in their communities and nations, but of the world;

That as their total needs require a team-work concept and the complete utilisation and integration of many disciplines, arts and skills,

The same team-work concept of total planning through the complete utilisation and integration of the resources of all agencies, both public and

voluntary, is essential at the community, national and international levels."

Conference's Success.—The success of the Conference lay in its efforts to focus world and national attention on the various aspects of the problems of children and to systematise the various recommendations in respect of the different sections of Child Welfare. It was helped in this great task by co-ordination of the efforts of experts and social workers.

It suffered in its resources from a lack of data to enable it to assess the magnitude of the problems before it. Not many Governments helped the Conference by submitting reports of the work done in their States, while in respect of others only a sectional survey of efforts undertaken was made available to the Conference. Better planning and fuller co-operation from the Governments will, in future, help subsequent Conferences to analyse the problems more fully and to plan more completely and coordinate the various preventive and curative methods evolved everywhere.

An important observation, and one that was made by competent Asian delegates, was that the Conference lacked planning in a perspective. Like most Conferences that have their inspiration in Europe, this Conference suffered from the difference in approach between the Western and Asiatic concept of the problems of Child Welfare. Though this handicap was later made up by some Indian and other Asiatic delegates, and a corrective in emphasis brought to bear upon the deliberations, the proportion of concentration upon the specific problems of Child Welfare in Asian Countries was found to be inadequate.

For, comparatively the Western approach is mainly one of a clinical nature. Most Western Countries having achieved a relatively high standard of living and of social security, the children of those countries have

adequate provisions for basic human needs. They do not suffer as much from the effects of poverty and mal-nutrition, overcrowding or lack of education, as do the children of most Asiatic countries. Their problems are not so much the problems of prevention as of cure. The proportion of physically handicapped children is greater there than that of those handicapped by unfavourable environment. Since society is so well advanced generally, their problems can find easy solution in clinics and curative treatment.

Children in Asian Countries.—But the problem of children in most Asian and other under-developed countries is mainly one of rescue from the circumstances of poverty and mal-nutrition, of low standard of living, of overcrowding and illiteracy, of endemic disease and attendant social and psychological handicaps. In Asian countries, there are far more problem children that need care as a result of living and growing under these circumstances than those suffering from other causes. While even in Asian countries those children that require the care and treatment of clinical methods can be taken care of to a large extent by Government and allied agencies, those vast millions who are the victims of poverty and overbearing social conditions do not receive adequate or even cursory attention. Such children develop into vast problem complexes and social outcasts whose life is condemned to rotate within a vicious circle, perpetuating their own conditions and dragging down the whole social fabric to the level of their own miserable standards. No clinical approach to their problems is possible. Their case has to be handled on the community level and on the front of raising their standard of living. The Conference failed to recognise their case adequately and to emphasise its concern for them. For an assessment of such problems, the case of children in India will be a fair average.

The Five Year Plan.—The approach to child welfare on the plane of a higher standard of living is an approach that is fundamental and yet limited in scope as far as the time factor is concerned. A higher standard of living involves governmental policies in respect of economic planning, distribution of wealth between various sections of society and special provisions for child welfare. In India, the Five Year Plan has fortunately recognised the importance of the following aspects of Child Welfare which need special attention:

1. The need to supplement the diet of children, especially in the case of under-nourished children, in schools and other institutions;
2. Pilot projects for dealing with the problem of feeble-minded children;
3. Child guidance clinics;
4. Organisation of creches to look after the children of working mothers;
5. Maintenance and management of play grounds.

6. Organisation of children centres, each with a well equipped playground, library of juvenile literature, a stage and facilities for developing child art and crafts.
7. Organisation of institutions for the welfare of orphaned, deserted and destitute children. It is suggested that the orphanages and other similar institutions should be registered and supervised.

In addition, to deal with the problem of juvenile delinquency, the Ministry of Education has drafted a Model Act.

While the Plan can only indicate the nature of the problems to be tackled and besides, also make certain financial provisions, its efforts are limited by the availability of resources and by its order of priorities.

Infant Mortality.—The problems of infant mortality are the first that have to be dealt with. Out of a total population of about 360 millions, there are 155 millions below the age of 17 years. Of these 3,177,628 children die every year. The age groups that are affected are as under:—

Year	Under 1 year	1-4 years	5-6 years	10-14 years
1936	1,539,749	1,113,816	332,286	184,340
1937	1,518,569	1,138,221	327,031	182,231
1938	1,570,169	1,301,531	372,020	200,398
1939	1,454,678	1,111,314	183,308	199,379
1940	1,483,338	1,144,628	188,353	199,153
1941	1,489,283	1,215,761	109,762	223,085
1942	1,416,640	1,141,093	221,808	224,319
1943	1,280,094	1,184,841	286,042	273,445
1944	1,305,333	1,334,569	202,831	274,895

Even though infant mortality rate which was 168.1 per thousand in 1932 has fallen to 132.8 in 1949, there is still much to be done. If social services, both governmental and others, can reach the villages, then the death rate can be kept down to a minimum.

Poverty and Delinquency.—Juvenile delinquency which is primarily a result of poverty

and social conditions is on the increase in the country. Only such cases can be brought to the notice of public workers and government as occur in cities, but the vast majority of those in the villages of India remain unnoticed and uncared for. Children's acts are now in force in all the major States of the country, and in 1949, 25,163 boys and

2,249 girls were put up before the Court for the following reasons:—

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------|
| (1) Offences against property . . | 7,793 |
| (2) Charged under the Railway Act. | 1,315 |
| (3) Children in moral danger . . | 449 |
| (4) Rape | 93 |
| (5) Miscellaneous | 11,393 |
| (6) No guardians | 2,404 |

These figures speak of the inadequacy of the machinery for detecting cases of delin-

quency and not of its magnitude. The problems are much vaster.

Comparative statistics in the field of education also are educative. The total number of children between 6 and 11 years attending primary schools was 17,654,600 in 1949-50, whilst the number of boys and girls attending school between 11 and 17 years was 4,793,500. Relative figures including those of expenditure in various countries including India are as follows:—

Country	Total population	Number of pupils		Per capita expenditure
		1937	1946	
Czechoslovakia	12,463,000	1,542,358	1,381,001	
Australia	7,912,000	692,000	903,000	
Canada	13,549,000	1,952,775	1,802,900	Rs. 82.5
U. of S. Africa	12,112,000	863,347	1,251,590	
U.S.A.	150,697,000	20,150,216	17,898,750	Rs. 97.3
Italy	45,906,000	5,186,781	4,835,566	
India	346,000,000	10,538,790	15,883,576	Rs. 2.3
France	41,550,000	5,292,997	4,399,454	
U.S.S.R.	193,000,000	—	33,200,000	Rs 360

In the United Kingdom, the per capita expenditure is Rs. 74.5; in India, it is Rs. 2.3. While in Bombay State it is Rs. 28.4, in Bombay City it is Rs. 72.5. The great leeway that we have to make up in the field of education is evident from the above table, as also the unequal development among the different States in the country. If in this field of Child Welfare, we have to plan for equal development all over the country, then such planning cannot be left entirely to the capacity of each State to bear the burden. The Central Government must step in both as regard finance and programme.

Future Scope of Work.—Having surveyed the context in which the Conference was held and the work of the Conference itself, it is now possible to project the type of organisation and its scope of work in dealing with the various problems of child welfare in relation to India.

No statistics are available in the other spheres of child welfare activity to prove the gravity of the situation as it exists to-day. But the problems of mal-nutrition, children's diseases, destitute and orphaned, handicapped and maladjusted children, bad housing, sanitation and cleanliness or recreation and protection are present in such large numbers all over the country that nothing short of a total effort can even approach anywhere near a solution. The first task, naturally, must be a broad survey undertaken to assess their immensity. No voluntary agency can, by itself undertake this responsibility. This must be the task of the Government, of course, aided by such agencies. Once the problems are surveyed, then a comprehensive plan of action can be drawn up, distributing the available resources in money, personnel and clinical facilities according to priorities that are predetermined.

Generally, voluntary agencies function in the cities, leaving out of their scope the rural population. When such surveys are undertaken, they must be able to assess correctly the problems in the rural areas which are generally neglected upto now, and which must receive greater attention to make up for past neglect.

Need for Surveys.—It would be well also if the surveys are divided into two broad categories, preventive and curative. Preventive methods, as they are very often of an educative type, can, in most cases, be undertaken by agencies while curative methods require specialised agencies, e.g., clinics, which are not possible to be established in sufficiently adequate numbers except by Government itself. If these two broad categories of work could be defined, then the tasks of allocating responsibilities would be easier and results quicker. Work in either sphere can be carried on independently of each other, and it will not hamper the progress of the other if work in one sphere does not develop upto expectations.

With so many agencies in the field, there is bound to be overlapping, wastage of efforts and finance and uncoordinated progress. It will, therefore, be necessary, if the maximum results are to be achieved, to coordinate the efforts of all agencies and to make available the favourable methods of one for adoption by another. To the agencies themselves, there must be given full freedom as all agencies are likely to take on a pattern of function to suit local conditions. They must be free to take initiative, carry out innovations in the field of welfare, of course within the broad framework of an agreed programme. This naturally presupposes a supreme agency at the top, which must be the Indian Council for Child Welfare and to which must be entrusted by the Government all non-governmental responsibilities for child welfare. Finance and

personnel must be put at its disposal in a liberal manner.

Voluntary Agencies.—It is necessary at this stage to stress the need for developing child welfare work by non-governmental agencies. The work of child welfare being of such a delicate nature is unsuitable to be handled by government departments. Besides, welfare work takes on different patterns in different circumstances. Government departments are too rigid for such a varied adaptation. Bureaucracy is hardly likely to be patient with delays or sympathetic to idiosyncrasies and moods that are a constant feature of welfare work. If agencies could be registered with Government and the Indian Council for Child Welfare, then only such agencies could be given the resources that Governments desire to utilise.

These resources in any case are too meagre for the immense task ahead. In the Five Year Plan, social services are allocated Rs. 339.8 crores, of which Rs. 155.66 crores are earmarked for Education, Rs. 99.54 crores for Health, Rs. 48.81 crores for Housing, Rs. 6.91 crores for Labour and Labour Welfare and Rs. 28.87 crores for Welfare of Backward Classes and Scheduled Castes and tribes. Child Welfare does not find specific mention. Somewhere within these allocations, e.g., in Education and Health, the section on Child Welfare may indirectly be given a quota. This also is problematical. Government must find some resources for this work and the rest must come from the Community. Perhaps a little may be squeezed out of the Rs. 90 crores allotted for Community Projects, and this too only in those areas where Community Projects are undertaken.

Even if resources in personnel and finances are available, there still remains the need for evolving patterns of work for implementing the schemes of Child Welfare. No amount of

theorising or planning on paper will make for success unless all these schemes are tested in actuality. It is here that the importance of the Community Projects is emphasised. They afford an opportunity for evolving different patterns and initiating schemes. They can be developed into the world's laboratory for schemes of Child Welfare of the rural pattern. The lessons and experiences in the selected areas can serve as models not merely for India but also for all Asian and under-developed countries. For here, for the first time, can be tested the effects of integrated development and their cumulative effects upon the lives of children.

Importance of Community Projects.—Community Projects with their integrated and patterned development can, if properly worked out, serve as pilot schemes for Child Welfare. Since they are limited to 55 Schemes and spread out all over the country in varying physical terrain and cultural atmospheres, their development may serve us as sample surveys, affording much analytical data. Education, health, housing and training for employment can all be experimented upon. Here also, in a concentrated and approachable form, the parents of children are available to whom a systematic approach in the problems of Child Welfare is possible. Concentration of efforts and the collection of resources can also be innovated. In Community Projects, developing society can be made to include in its evolution multiple schemes of Child Welfare.

The structure of Community Projects is perhaps the most encouraging aspect and one that lends itself to co-operative efforts to help children. Each project is about 450 to 500 square miles in area comprising nearly 300 villages with a population of about 200,000. Again each Project area is divided into Development Blocks, each of about 100

villages and 60,000 to 70,000 persons. Each development block is in turn divided into groups of five villages with a village level worker in charge. For each Project there will be a Project Executive Officer, a staff of 125 supervisors and the village level workers. Since the accent of these schemes is on the development of initiative of and co-operation by the villages, a Project Advisory Committee is provided for to assist the Project officers. The participation of the people in the execution as well as planning is the essence of the whole programme

Child Welfare Workers' Training.—Under such circumstances in which non-official personnel and the people co-operate in a joint endeavour, it would be possible for some workers to be trained in the simple schemes of Child Welfare. If each Development Block has one such worker to interest himself in the schemes of Child Welfare, then the three workers in the three Development Blocks can co-ordinate the total work of Child Welfare in the Project area. The people, whose consciousness of responsibility can be aroused to co-operate in this grand adventure, can help to bring to the attention of these workers those children that need attention or those circumstances that need remedying. In a co-operative effort of the people and the trained worker, even complete surveys in regard to children's needs can be made.

The dearth of finance from Government, which is the cause of the abandonment of so many good schemes need not worry the social worker here. Since the accent is on co-operation and self-help the villages must be able to gather the slender resources necessary for this work. Cooperative effort itself keeps down the expenses of such schemes. What little is necessary beyond the sums allocated by Government must be collected by the

villagers in the manner of the Community Chests in America. This splendid community effort to finance the various local schemes in America needs introducing in this country. Far too long have the people looked to Government or public charities for financing efforts. It is high time now that the people developed enough self-respect to have confidence in their own collective efforts for their own advancement. What better beginning

can there be than to start with collective efforts to build up a Community Chest for Child Welfare in their own. Project areas.

The prospects for Child Welfare work are bright. Only the Governments, voluntary agencies and the people must be brought together to pool their resources so that the children of India may be assured a happy future.