

A Future for the World's Children: Possibility or Impossibility?

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A wonderful report on the needs of the world's children, with strong and well documented recommendations for enhancing their development, was published in February of 2020 by the *Lancet* Commission, under the auspices of the World Health Organization [1]. However, it was published just as the first alarms were being raised about the coronavirus and, unfortunately, its message as well as any will to address the needs reported in the document, were lost in the "survival" mode activities that most countries in the world have been focused on since that time. While the majority of the world's children have not caught the virus, many of their parents, grandparents, and other caregivers have been ill and many have died from the effects of this disease. Since children are not yet able to be vaccinated, the risk of this disease remains high for many of them. The horrendous toll the disease has taken on families throughout the world has added another danger to the many unsafe and unhealthy conditions that were described as problematic for the "world children's future" in this important report. With at least some hope that the pandemic will be conquered (or fade away) by 2022, perhaps it is time to review the *Lancet* Commission report recommendations and to gain the will to address the status of children throughout the world.

There are a number of statements and recommendations in the report that are common knowledge, although little action has been taken to address these. For example, it states that investment in children's health has lifelong, intergenerational, and economic benefits and that the care and protection of children and families is a duty of governments. It discusses the "rights and entitlements" of children in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

(which has been ratified by all UN countries except the United States!) and it discusses a list of Sustainable Development Goals that include many goals that are focused on child health and child rights. It also presents a grim picture of the lives of many children (which are even worse now than when the document was written!) and makes a strong case for how investments in child health and education can be cost-effective.

Various sections of the report discuss the environmental issues that face the planet, the entitlements that children should have, the importance of protecting children and families and their rights, the role of education in supporting children's development, and the shared responsibility of governments (both local and global) to "make children a priority, mobilize funds, and organize action to address such issues." The report also addresses ways to remove harmful elements in children's lives such as regulating commercial marketing to children and preventing their exposure to harmful online experiences. It also provides extensive suggestions for action by governments to support child-friendly and environment-friendly goals.

The report ends on a positive note, suggesting that the world's children face great opportunities if the world countries can "usher future generations into a cleaner, healthier world" but it stresses the need for politicians, community leaders, and international agencies to be bold and courageous to "radically change the way they work. No excuses and no time to lose".

Unfortunately, we have already lost two years of time since this report was written and during that time the priorities of govern-

ments, agencies, and families have been focused on more immediate health issues rather than on the possibilities of a worldwide commitment to children's welfare and optimal growth. It is my hope that in the next few years, as this pandemic runs its course, the dire state of many children in every country of the world will become of more prominent concern. Hopefully, the messages and suggestions from the report on "A future for the world's children?" will be a catalyst for substantive improvements in worldwide governmental cooperation to make such a future possible. I am ready to support these goals. Are you?

Bibliography

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