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**ABSTRACT**

This report focuses on children and the community. In the community. In the opening address, Dr. Willem H. Welling, Executive Director of the van Leer Foundation, describes the history of the foundation and the content of previous seminars. He concludes the address with a discussion of community empowerment. Father Gerard Pantin, the keynote speaker, discusses the helper's role in community development. The seminar summary and recommendations are divided into three sections. The first section concerns the management of the social and physical environment of the young child and the family. It stresses the importance of community programs and local empowerment in easing the stresses of changing family roles. The second section explores ways of caring for and educating the young child. These include quality day care programs, home care, play groups, and programs for teenaged mothers and hard-to-reach families. The third section discusses the process of sharing and implementing a new model of early childhood education and care. Factors which may affect implementation of the model include available resources, networking, steps in the process, evaluation, advocacy and cooperation. (RJC)

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**Bernard van Leer Foundation**



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**Children and community:  
progressing through partnership**

**Summary Report and Conclusions**

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**Tenth International Seminar  
with the cooperation of  
the University of the West Indies  
Kingston, Jamaica  
14-24 November 1988**

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## THE WORK OF THE BERNARD VAN LEER FOUNDATION

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### **What is the Bernard van Leer Foundation?**

The Foundation takes its name from Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist who died in 1958 and gave the entire share capital of his worldwide enterprise for humanitarian purposes. The Foundation's money comes from the profits of the Van Leer Group of Companies, which specialises in making packaging materials and products, and is established in 30 countries.

### **What does the Foundation do?**

The Foundation supports innovative projects which are designed to improve the educational, social and developmental opportunities of children from birth to eight years of age. Over 100 major projects are currently being supported in nearly 40 countries around the world including both industrialised and developing nations. In all cases, the focus is on those children and communities that are least able to benefit from educational and developmental opportunities because of social and other forms of disadvantage. These include the children of ethnic and cultural minorities, children living in urban slums, shanty towns, and remote rural areas, and children of teenage parents.

### **Who organises the projects?**

The Foundation does not organise or manage projects. It works with partners in the countries where the projects are located. For example, project partners include government departments, local municipalities, trade unions, academic institutions and voluntary organisations. These local partners are responsible for all aspects of a project – development, management, training, implementation, evaluation. They also contribute a proportion of the costs in terms of both money and services. A key objective in the initiation and implementation of projects is that the effectiveness of the work they succeed in developing will last long after the Foundation has withdrawn from the project.

### **How does the Foundation work?**

The Foundation does not just give grants, it also provides technical advice, information and professional support to projects in the field. The Foundation Network consists of people associated with projects and the staff of the Foundation. An important part of the support given by the Foundation is the stimulation of exchanges of information, ideas and experiences between projects. Inter-project visits are arranged, seminars and workshops are organised, and publications based on project experiences are produced.

### **What do the projects do?**

All projects supported by the Foundation have, at their core, the education, care and development of young children. An essential ingredient of projects is the close involvement of the parents of the children and of the surrounding community. This is based on the belief that the home is the most important environment affecting human development, and that the community is also important. Projects do not therefore look only at educational activities which take place in pre-schools, nurseries or primary schools, they work with adults in their

*Continued on inside back cover*

**Bernard van Leer Foundation**



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## CONTENTS

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	page
Background	1
Opening address by Dr Willem H. Welling	6
Keynote address by Fr Gerry Pantin	16
Summary Report and Conclusions	
I. The young child and the family: managing the social and physical environment	36
II. Care and education for the young child: exploring alternative ways	51
III. Moving to scale: from local practice to general policy	63
IV. Conclusions	74
Participants and Observers	76

*This seminar report is dedicated to the memory of  
Mr Dudley R.B. Grant  
consultant and friend to the Bernard van Leer Foundation,  
educator and 'father' of the Basic Schools movement for  
early childhood education and care in Jamaica*

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## BACKGROUND

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The Bernard van Leer Foundation has, from its earliest days, encouraged the creation of links between educators throughout the world concerned with the problems of disadvantaged young children and their families. Opportunities for an interchange of ideas and information have always been recognised as integral to the process of influencing international thinking and practice. By promoting regular and open debate between policy makers and practitioners, and facilitating exchanges between projects spanning widely differing cultures and societies, the Foundation has constantly striven to maintain a dialogue about its work, as well as dissemination of the outcomes. Its International Seminar Programme is therefore an important element in the overall aims and work of the Foundation.

As such, the Tenth International Seminar on 'Children and Community: Progressing through Partnership', held in Kingston, Jamaica in November 1988 represented the latest in a long tradition of such exchanges, spanning nearly two decades of endeavour. Starting in 1971, seminars have been staged in Kingston, Jamaica; Jerusalem, Israel (1972); Curaçao, The Netherlands Antilles (1974); Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (1977); Cali, Colombia (1979); Harare, Zimbabwe (1981); Granada, Spain (1984); Lima, Peru (1986) and Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia (1987). The 1988 Jamaican seminar marked a milestone in the Foundation's history.

By being staged in Jamaica – still suffering the aftermath of the worst hurricane to hit the island in a century – and by being organised in cooperation with the University of the West Indies, it recalled and celebrated the fact that the Foundation has been involved with pre-school developments



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in that nation since the 1960s, when it supported the Project for Early Childhood Education (PECE). Currently, the Foundation is involved with three projects in Jamaica – a programme for teenage mothers and their children at Maypen; a training and development programme for teachers in Basic Schools; and the development of a unique Bachelor of Education degree through summer courses in early childhood education at the University of the West Indies.

Sadly, the Seminar also became the occasion on which to pay homage to one of Jamaica's greatest educators, Mr Dudley R.B. Grant, doyen of the Foundation's corps of consultants around the world, the 'father' of the Jamaican Basic Schools movement, a counsellor and friend to the Foundation for a quarter of a century, and an indefatigable worker for early childhood care and education. Earlier in 1988, Dudley Grant had been the Foundation's invited speaker at the opening by HRH Prince Claus of The Netherlands of its new headquarters in The Hague. In August 1988, in the course of organising the seminar, he died. This report is dedicated to his memory. His widow, Mrs Jean Grant, was an honoured participant of the seminar throughout its duration.

The seminar's focus of discussion was over a wider canvas than usual. In essence, the aim became both to take stock of the accumulated experience of projects spanning many communities and diverse cultures, and to consider the challenges that still lie ahead. The twin pillars of review and prognosis, of learning from the past as well as looking towards the future, characterised the programme.

Whatever the local features of projects supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation over the years, the focus of their attention – although expressed in different forms – has always been a set of fundamental partnerships. The first or 'primary partnership' is the key relationship between parent and child. The enhancement of that partnership lies at the heart of most projects supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The complexity of that task, given the varying circumstances, cultures and environments in which projects operate, is itself a constant challenge.

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The second partnership has sought to break down barriers and strengthen relations between mainstream provision for young children and what is done for the marginalised and minority groups within societies; an educative process in itself which has attempted to incorporate the lessons from the field into the practice of national systems.

The third partnership relates to the development of more amenable, and hence more effective, strategies for providing for deprived communities, utilising their strengths and being responsive to their needs. To develop an affordable and meaningful partnership between communities and professionals remains a challenge but has also led to the development of important alternative approaches and innovations.

To discuss these and allied issues the seminar brought together 44 participants, drawn from 32 different countries, together with representatives of seven international agencies and 10 national observers; the largest gathering of the Bernard van Leer Foundation network ever staged. The full list of those who attended is provided as an appendix to this report.

The seminar was officially opened by the Governor General of Jamaica, His Excellency the Most Hon. Sir Florizel Glasspole, ON, GCMG, CD, LL.D (Hon.). The opening ceremony was chaired by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, Mr Allister McIntyre, and the guests were welcomed to Jamaica by the Minister of Education, the Hon. Dr Neville Gallimore.

During the course of his main address, Dr Willem H. Welling, marking his imminent retirement as Executive Director of the Foundation after 20 years, said: 'In the days and years to come, it can be expected that there will be changes: of style, of emphasis, of approach. But I want to assure you, and the people of Jamaica, and beyond them the many young families and their children throughout the world who look to the Foundation for support and cooperation, that what will *not* change will be the dedication of the Bernard van Leer Foundation to their cause, to their fundamental concerns and to their welfare.' The full text of Dr Welling's speech is included in this report.

The Keynote Address was given by Fr Gerard Pantin, Executive Director of Servol (Service Volunteered For All), Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. The full text of that speech is also included. Special papers on the three themes that constituted the Seminar itself were given by Dr Walter Barker, Director of the Child Development Programme at the University of Bristol, United Kingdom and Ms Joana Manguera, of the Ministry of Health, Maputo, Mozambique on 'The Young Child and the Family: Managing the Social and Physical Environment'; by Dr Maria Angelica Kotliarenco, of the *Centro de Estudio para Atención del Niño y la Mujer* (CEANIM), Santiago, Chile and Ms Rosemary Renwick, Department of Education, Wellington, New Zealand on 'Care and Education for the Young Child: Exploring Alternative Ways'; and by Ms Joyce Jarrett, of the Maypen Teenage Mothers Project, University of the West Indies, Jamaica and Dr Heather Weiss, of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA on 'Moving to Scale: From Local Practice to General Policy'.

The three working groups which comprised the core of the Seminar's discussions were chaired by Mr Livingstone Mwaura, of the National Centre for Early Childhood Education, Nairobi, Kenya; Dr Khoo Kim Choo, Executive Secretary, Child Care Services, the National Trades Union Congress, Singapore; and Dr Marta Arango, Director of the *Centro Internacional de Educación y Desarrollo Humano* (CINDEH), Medellín, Colombia.

The working groups were greatly assisted in their task by the diligent and accurate work of the rapporteurs: Dr Maria Chavez, of the Hispanic Families Project, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA; Mrs Marion Flett, of the Young Families Now project, University of Aberdeen, United Kingdom; and Ms Myrtle Gaynor-Daley, of the North Coast project, University of the West Indies, Jamaica.

The report which follows is based on the work of all those who contributed to the deliberations, and was unanimously adopted by participants at the seminar's closing session, addressed by the Minister of State for Education, Senator

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Hugh Dawes and by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, Dr Leslie Robinson.

The Foundation, in making available this report of its Tenth International Seminar, wishes to record its profound gratitude to the Jamaican Organising Committee, under its chairman, Mr William McLeod, Managing Director of Van Leer (Jamaica) Ltd. The Committee and its supporters, including Mr Keith Brown, President of the Association of Basic Schools Parish Boards, overcame the difficulties of having to work in the wake of a major physical disaster to ensure the success of the seminar. Their combined efforts directed attention, in the words of the Jamaican National Anthem, to the broader aims of the work:

Teach us true respect for all,  
Stir response to duty's call,  
Strengthen us the weak to cherish,  
Give us wisdom lest we perish.

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OPENING ADDRESS

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**by Dr Willem H. Welling, Executive Director, Bernard van Leer Foundation**

Your Excellency, Honorable Minister, Vice-Chancellor,  
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

For the Bernard van Leer Foundation the holding of this seminar in Jamaica on the topic 'Children and Community: Progressing Through Partnership' is for several reasons a significant occasion. It is taking place only a few weeks after the country has been hit by a major natural disaster which has cost Jamaica dearly in lives and in material losses. Nevertheless, and despite the difficult recovery from the catastrophe, our Jamaican friends indicated that Jamaica would want the seminar to be held as originally planned. A tribute to the dedication and recuperative powers of the Jamaican people is certainly in place here.

This is also the tenth in a series of seminars organised by the Foundation which actually began here in Kingston in 1971. The Foundation's International Seminar Programme has been a major formative influence on its work over the intervening years and, I believe, a positive impulse for the furtherance and promotion of new thinking about the young child and family throughout the world. The Seminar Programme has visited all continents and spoken out to peoples at all stages of development, reaching them through their shared interest in young children. It is fitting that on this tenth occasion we should return to the country where the Programme was born and from which the Foundation has derived so much of its inspiration over the years.

### **Tribute to Dudley Grant**

With respect for the man and his work, the seminar commemorates the life's work of a remarkable Jamaican, Dudley R.B. Grant. Dudley passed away on 25 August this year, still actively engaged in planning this seminar. In his meticulous way, he left the most detailed instructions for the realisation of the seminar. In working out the plans for the coming days the Jamaican Organising Committee, consisting of friends of Dudley, has remained faithful to his 'vision'.

In fact the history of the Foundation in Jamaica goes back much further than the first Kingston seminar. Indeed, the programme of the present day Foundation can be said to have originated in this country in 1966 with the establishment of the Project for Early Childhood Education (PECE) at the University of the West Indies. PECE led in turn to the establishment at the University of the Bernard van Leer Centre for Early Childhood Education which endures to this day. Since then, a new generation of projects has emerged, different in nature but all with a focus on the disadvantaged young child and all linked to the University. These are the Project for Teenage Mothers and Children at Maypen, the Project for Upgrading Basic School Teachers on the North Coast and the Special Bachelor of Education Course at the University. It is fitting therefore that our partners in this venture today should again be the University of the West Indies with which I personally have a very special relationship.

As I said, this occasion is in some way also a tribute to Jamaica and a recognition of the work of Dudley Grant. The Trustees of the Bernard van Leer Foundation have set up a memorial fund in the name of Dudley Grant with the specific purpose of restoring and rehabilitating Basic Schools which have been damaged by the recent hurricane. Trustees have launched this Fund with a contribution of US\$ 250,000 and a further 20,000 Swiss Francs have since been added by Societé Générale de Surveillance in Geneva. It is hoped that these donations will be the beginning of a much greater national and international support effort on behalf of the Basic Schools going beyond rehabilitation to further development.

### **Looking beyond the school**

When the Foundation's first seminar was held here in 1971, the focus of attention was on pre-school education *per se*. It sought to discover ways of limiting - even erasing - the

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gap between the demands of prevailing education systems on the one hand and disadvantaged families and children on the other. But even then, participants were aware of the limitations of such an approach. The seminar report states:

The whole of education, in school at any rate, is itself only one of the factors which will affect the mental and physical growth of the child, and should therefore never be considered in isolation. Health, housing, economic situations and social patterns will affect the child as much as the schools can ever hope to affect it.

The next seminar was held in Jerusalem in the following year. Its title, 'Curriculum in Early Childhood Education', indicated that there was increasing sensitivity to the fact that fostering pre-schooling simply as a 'good thing' for children was not enough, but that there was a need for attention to quality, particularly the matter of 'cultural relativism'. In the words of the Jerusalem seminar report:

The lack of appreciation of the need for cultural relativism has often meant that the strengths and positive features of disadvantaged children and their families have been overlooked. In many situations the effort has been made to adapt the child to the educational programme, instead of the programme to the child. Thus the chance to use such positive features as a rich heritage of folk tales and story-telling has been missed.

That observation, and what stemmed from it, has been highly influential in the Foundation's programme, as the Jerusalem seminar included a recommendation that the initial concept of 'compensation' be abandoned for a much more positive approach. Not only here in Jamaica, but in countries as far apart as Sweden and Colombia, projects have developed curricula which not only draw on local traditions and cultures, but which have actually rescued, and are now passing on to new generations, a heritage of local and regional culture that rightly belongs to the people themselves. This idea also influenced the Foundation's thinking about multicultural societies where, it was realised, education that uses the vernacular in which children feel most at home is more likely to be beneficial, particularly to

children in their early years. The harmonisation of home and school cultures was central to this issue.

### Innovation and sustainability

This theme was examined in greater detail in the third seminar held in Willemstad in Curaçao, The Netherlands Antilles in 1974 to discuss 'Innovation in Early Childhood Education'. It is interesting to consider how relevant the themes of that meeting were in the light of the forthcoming discussions here. The seminar looked at 'Child Rearing Practices and the Development of the Caribbean Child'; 'The Teacher as the Central Pivot of Change and Innovation'; and 'Linking School and Community'. Some 14 years later, those items remain on our agenda, even if the focus has altered considerably. With hindsight, the Curaçao seminar still saw the *teacher* as the focal point of the intervention process: we have definitely moved on since then!

Our discussions in Malaysia in 1978 addressed 'Sustainability of Change in Education'. Again a number of principles were enunciated which have since guided the Foundation's path. There was a general consensus, for example, that in stressing the role of education, reference was made to much more than the formal school system. To quote from the seminar report:

Education is seen as continuous process, starting from birth, which takes place in the home, on the street, in the market, in the fields as well as in the school classroom. It involves all the learning experiences of life, aiming at the maximum development of human potentialities.

Not only was the concept of 'education' redefined, going beyond mere 'schooling', it was also acknowledged that there were social, economic and political barriers to human development and growth which lay outside the powers of formal education systems to remedy: social class differences; the marginalisation of minority communities; differences in languages and cultures between home and school; the effects of poor physical environments, inadequate nutrition and poor health. At the same time, it was re-affirmed that school systems had a major contribution to make, if only they would recognise the need to explore alternative models, recognise the potency of the family and community themselves as teaching



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resources and as educators, and appreciate the value of para-professionals in acting as a bridge between the trained professional and the wider community.

The Foundation was inspired in that view by the growing experiences of projects in countries undergoing processes of social and economic transition. It has to be faced that such countries sometimes sought to take Western models of intervention 'off the shelf', although these foreign imports were plainly not meeting the needs even of the communities for whom they were originally designed. That these models are not only costly, alienating, often ineffective, but also disabling to large sections of people, was brought home to us when we met in 1979 in Cali, Colombia and discussed 'Parent and Community Involvement in Early Childhood Education'.

#### **Para-professionals**

This was a time when increasing attention was being paid to the educational para-professional. Indeed it has been claimed that Dudley Grant was the father of the term. Such workers introduced an entirely new dimension into the context of the school – familiarity with the wider community and its reality, sensitivity and familiarity with local culture, awareness of real life experiences. Through them, professional services could be transformed. As the seminar noted, 'they place at the disposal of education a whole new range of skills, insights and perceptions'.

At that seminar, Foundation-supported projects in Colombia, Jamaica, Trinidad and Venezuela all demonstrated, in differing ways and contexts, the special force of this innovative approach, even though most participants were dissatisfied with the term 'para-professional' itself, as neither doing justice to the contribution of the individual nor recognising the positive influence of such roles. And those contributions and influences are considerable. The Cali seminar report stated:

Such a method [of using para-professionals] has several obvious advantages over a fully professionalised system, which is barely attainable even in the wealthiest societies. It is economically not beyond the means of a poor country. The front-line workers are selected if not from the same

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community, certainly from similar social class backgrounds to the children involved and are chosen for their sense of commitment to the task in hand. The children thus have a greater chance of individual contact with warm understanding and above all familiar adults not too far different in their ways from the parents.

The development of para-professionals has, since those days, become a familiar feature of the Bernard van Leer Foundation's work in many countries. This has helped to 'grow' skills locally, to provide a genuinely 'reciprocal' system, in which both families and para-professionals benefit, and in which consistency and continuity of care – those essential prerequisites of early childhood provision – are built into the local community. The Cali seminar enunciated clearly that the process not only benefited the child, but also the community itself.

#### **Democratisation of knowledge**

But the deployment of para-professionals is about something much deeper. It is essentially about the democratisation of knowledge – and knowledge, as we all know, means power. In Zimbabwe in 1981 – shortly after that country had achieved its hard-won independence – a seminar was held on the theme of 'Integrated and Early Childhood Education: Preparation for Social Development'. As was said then:

The real hope for social change and improvement within disadvantaged societies lies in the potential for responsible individuals, both independently and collectively, to shape and carry out their own initiatives to solve the problems which face their communities. Community development, the expression of this process, is therefore a means of achieving social change.

#### **Multicultural societies**

The Zimbabwe seminar was talking about 'enabling' local people to decide their own priorities; seeing education as, in the words of Paulo Freire, 'the practice of freedom – the means by which men and women critically and creatively with reality, and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world'. This is particularly important in a world which, while apparently shrinking and becoming more integrated, is actually fragmenting and becoming increasingly aware of its diversity, of the fact that we all

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now live in multicultural societies in which national consensus – on aims, principles and priorities – becomes daily more difficult to achieve.

In Granada, Spain in 1984, the seminar considered 'Multicultural Societies: Early Childhood Education and Care'. It was recognised that the process of marginalising ethnic minorities was a universal one, and that the world was facing the very real threat of the extinction of distinct cultures, just as modern technology has endangered the fauna and flora of the natural world. What emerged from that discussion in Spain was a realisation that, through the medium of early childhood education and care, we can make a solid contribution to preserving and enhancing local cultural heritages for the benefit of humanity and to conserving the very identity of the children we were seeking to help. Children – it was stressed – learn better when immersed in their own, rather than an alien, symbolic world.

#### **Parents as prime educators**

Aware of the urgency of the need, as well as the resistance to change within societies, the subject of the seminar in Lima, Peru in 1986 was 'The Parent as Prime Educator: Changing Patterns of Parenthood'. It re-affirmed that:

Family education and its support systems should be guided by the principle that all human beings have the right to develop their potential to the full, to carry responsibility for their own deeds, and to be valued as individuals. Equally, every society, if it is to release the capacities of its population for the benefit of all, needs to understand and create the structures and opportunities for this process to occur.

The Lima seminar actually articulated another powerful theme that has run through the Bernard van Leer Foundation's programme since that time: that by focusing on the young child and his or her full development, the development of entire families and communities is also addressed. This is not divorced from the issue of child care but, quite to the contrary, the two are interdependent. It is not only the case that healthy children need healthy and strong bodies. Equally, they need healthy and strong supporting communities. *To*

*that extent*, we are in the business of community development, just as much as we are in the business of child development.

### Children at the margin

That was even more clearly stated in Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia last year, when we looked specifically at the issue of 'Children at the Margin'. As was reported then:

At the core of the problem, particularly as it affects the marginalised child, is the need for the family context to be positively educational, and for families to have the surety and self-confidence to make an educational contribution in wider groups. But in order for this to occur, the family context has to be consistent ... families need to achieve greater stability, flexibility and consistency, to enable them happily to carry out their educational role, building up their own self-esteem.

### Empowerment of communities

As you see, Your Excellency, we have come a long way since those first pioneering days in Jamaica back in 1971. *Then we were theorising; today we know.* We know, through the experiences of hundreds of projects throughout the world, that we really can influence the well-being and the futures of young children and their families, regardless of their environmental or economic conditions, and despite the broad cultural differences that exist. That knowledge gives us a renewed sense of urgency. We can no longer theorise about our agenda. More than ever, we must be action-oriented.

If we are really going to make an impact on the well-being of children growing up in deprived communities, it is the *totality* of their environment which has to be addressed. The message is empowerment, not only of the parents or the extended family, but of the whole community. We have to address not only the immediate provision for children but the disabling environment itself – whether it is the malarial infestation of the jungle, the polluted water supply of the rural village, or the drug-dominated sub-culture of the inner city.

Moreover, this must be done *through* and *with* the community itself. The community itself must want the change, and must itself perceive the need to change. And for that to happen, people must have some sense of personal space, of confidence. They must understand that their investment in

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change will be positive: that they can really shape their own lives.

So we can see our task afresh as essentially an 'enabling' one. The essence of effective strategies is that they build from the grassroots upwards. The work, the creativity, the energy has to come from the people themselves. Programmes cannot be imposed by administrations or bureaucracies. They must be low-cost, that is, affordable locally, as well as practical and appropriate. They have to be culturally-grounded – speaking to the people concerned in their own language and their own terms. This means involving, and being run by, the local community. In this sense, they have to be democratic, allowing access to new knowledge by families themselves. They must be organic, leading on to further development, and be on a human scale, so that people can feel comfortable and in control. And perhaps most important of all, they must be locally controlled, avoiding the dead hand of an often over-centralised bureaucracy. That is why we will be addressing this week a much more global theme, and doing so with a new confidence and conviction.

But in considering this theme we come with a clear perception that there is no single prototype, no 'model', which can neatly meet the diverse needs of disadvantaged communities. Instead, we have a series of broad principles which acknowledge the richness and diversity of cultures in the communities in which we work and are relevant to a multiplicity of settings. Or as Dudley Grant put it earlier this year: 'The thrust of the Foundation's work has been building people to put talent to work.'

#### Continued dedication

Your Excellency, on that note, and in the knowledge that in the coming days we will be in full flow, you may perhaps permit me a small diversion of my own. As you know, this is not only the Tenth International Seminar of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, it is also the last such occasion at which I will preside as Executive Director.

In the days and years to come, it can be expected that there will be changes: of style, of emphasis, of approach. But I want to assure you, and the people of Jamaica, and beyond them the many young families and their children throughout

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the world who look to the Foundation for support and cooperation, that what will *not* change will be the dedication of the Bernard van Leer Foundation to their cause, to their fundamental concerns and to their welfare.

The Foundation's investment over the years has been in the empowerment of those many people – still too many – throughout the world who find themselves in situations of often crippling disadvantage. It has indeed constantly worked on the development of human resources on the local and national scale and on the empowerment of communities themselves. In the end the Foundation has come to the recognition that the only way that young children can be brought to the fore in the social agenda is by the communities themselves, particularly parents should take the matter in hand. Children should not be at risk as a result of loose and changing relationships that provide little support or consistency of home environment in a society in which materialistic demands often cripple society's human and moral character.

On that note, Your Excellency, and on behalf of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, I would like to thank you for having graciously agreed to open this Tenth International Seminar and, through you, the people of Jamaica, for what they are doing for the young child. To all the participants, I extend a sincere wish for an enjoyable and fruitful debate.

**by Fr Gerard Pantin, Executive Director, Servo!,  
Trinidad and Tobago**

I am sure you all know that D.R.B. Grant<sup>1</sup> should be the one delivering this keynote address. No one can replace him, least of all myself; but I shall try to do the next best thing. Because Dudley and I have been close friends for 18 years, because we have soldiered together in our efforts to help disadvantaged children and families, especially because we have both reached out from Jamaica in the north and Trinidad in the south to the other islands of the Caribbean, my words will not be mine, they will be Dudley's as well.

How often, during the past years, when we were confronted with a crisis to be faced or a problem to be solved, he would grab me by the arm and say in a whisper which practically everyone in the room could hear, 'Gerry, I will open the batting on this issue and once the shine is off the ball, you come in and start to attack the bowling.'<sup>2</sup> Today, the shine is off the ball and Dudley has retired to the heavenly pavilion. I want to assure you, however, that every idea I place before you, every suggestion, is one which Dudley and I have shared many times over the years. So if during this seminar you seem to hear now and then a rumbling chuckle or grunt of approval in a Jamaican accent coming from somewhere in the sky, it is not your imagination. Dudley is still with us.

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1 Dudley Grant, who died in August 1988, was the director of the Project for Early Childhood Education (PECE) in Jamaica and subsequently the Director of the Bernard van Leer Centre for Early Childhood Education at the University of the West Indies.

2 The reference is to the game of cricket.

## Helping people

It is curious that every single one of us here has not the slightest doubt that helping people, especially those we refer to as 'poor' people, is a good thing. All of us are involved in helping people, all our cultures explicitly and implicitly approve of it, this very seminar is a visible manifestation of the widely held view that there is no better way of living than to spend your life in assisting those who need help.

I know that all of you have read the document which was circulated before the seminar entitled 'Conceptual Framework and Major Issues Relating to the Seminar Themes.' I have always admired the Bernard van Leer Foundation for the excellent reports which emerge from every seminar; it is my opinion that this particular statement is an absolutely magnificent summary of all the issues addressed by the Foundation over the last 20 years and one which should be read and studied for many years to come.

It is precisely because I am so impressed by this document that I feel we should begin this seminar by challenging and critically examining what we have taken for granted, that is that helping people is always a good thing. Strangely enough, once we have gotten over the shock of calling into question one of our most cherished beliefs, we suddenly realise that there are hundreds of examples of well intentioned people who set out to help others and end up by doing them a great deal of harm. There is the father who is determined to do the best for his son by giving him a university education when the young man is set on being a cabinet builder; or the mother who believes that a fat child is a healthy child and forces large quantities of food on the infant; or the university professor whose brain bulges with theories with which he indoctrinates his students; or the hot-shot First World economist who is obsessed with transforming the economy of a developing country into one like his own and retires 10 years later leaving a lot of poor people a lot poorer for the experience.

Yet, in most cases, people who try to help others begin with the best of intentions and are truly committed to the ideal of leading people out of the morass of ignorance and poverty. So what went wrong? What made us take up a position which, a long time later, we are forced to admit was flawed?



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from the very outset? What propelled us into action which was designed to improve the desperate situation of some group of people but which instead made it even worse, to the extent that in retrospect, we ask ourselves: 'How can we have been so stupid, so blind, so insensitive?'

It seems to me that an attempt should be made to grapple with this problem. It seems to me that if we ignore it or sweep it under the carpet, then we will throw ourselves into the fascinating themes of this seminar like a traveller who walks entranced through a wondrously lush and beautiful field without a compass as a guide. That is why, as an introductory address, I shall try to offer you some food for thought, for debate.

I do not know the complete answer to the questions I propose; I suppose no one does. All I can do is to place before you some of the things I have discovered over the years, many of them due to the countless mistakes I have made, and encourage you to add to the debate on this very difficult question of helping people. In so doing, I will resurrect some ideas which some of my friends have teasingly referred to as Gerry's theme song, the same way that all over the world people will remember Dudley for his early childhood education triangle<sup>3</sup>. I make no apologies because I am deadly serious when I say that unless we get this part of the exercise right, all our subsequent efforts will be tainted.

**We wish to be looked upon**

In the mid-1960s, two American sociologists conducted a study on the aspirations of Trinidadian youths as representatives of a typical developing society and in it they quoted this response from one of the adolescents interviewed:

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- 3 In his talks and his writing, Dudley Grant made great use of the triangle as means of illustrating schematically the elements which needed to be considered in order to understand basic concepts of early childhood education.

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We wish to be looked upon. I hope this examination would be a further step in my achievement of someone to be looked upon.<sup>4</sup>

Significantly, the authors entitled their book *We wish to be looked upon*. We do, you know. All of us. Each and every single human being wants to be 'looked upon'. This yearning to be someone special, to be acknowledged and acclaimed as such, is fundamental not only to pre-school children and adolescents but to politicians, academics and project directors as well as terrorists who hijack planes. It is a very basic need in every human being.

I am also suggesting that unless it is channelled in the right direction and brought under the conscious control of our will, this seemingly innocent train of wishing to be 'looked upon' conceals a very deadly virus which is wont to affect all of us who are involved in helping people. So eager are we to do something significant, to leave our mark on society, to implement a brilliant idea which has been taking shape in our minds from the latest book we have read, that we trample roughshod over the people we have decided to 'help'.

**Cultural arrogance** The situation worsens if we are the victims of another virus, the virus of *cultural arrogance*.

To assume that because people come from a certain country, or belong to a specific ethnic group, or have benefitted from a certain type of education, this automatically makes them superior to others is what I term cultural arrogance. Nor does the individual in question necessarily have to be an unpleasant, aggressive person. Very often the worst mutants of this virus are to be found in gentle, kind-hearted people who have been brought up in a background which has so blandly assumed the intellectual, moral and technical superiority of this type over others, that they take it for granted. Such people walk into a community situation not only with the calm assurance that they have a lot to offer but with the absolute certainty that they can help. Were

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4 Rubin, V. and Zavalloni, M., *We wish to be looked upon*, Teachers' College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, 1969.

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anyone to ask them whether they thought that *they* might be helped in the encounter, the answer would very probably be a puzzled look and a polite, 'I beg your pardon?' The most they would concede (were they academics) was that the year spent in the community did help them in the writing of a thesis on 'Sociological aberrations encountered in group dynamic experiences with disadvantaged people'.

If there is no genuine dialogue between the worker and the group then you can be quite certain that cultural arrogance is present. If the worker becomes the teacher and the group a bunch of docile pupils the same applies. Cultural arrogance is eliminated only when both sides recognise that they have as much to receive as to give and if, the longer the dialogue continues, each begins to actually feel guilty at having benefited far more from the encounter than the other. It is only when this insidious attitude is recognised and overcome that the worker can authentically and sensitively interfere in the lives of others.

I want to make it clear that the viruses of overly wanting to be looked upon and cultural arrogance are not restricted to any group, class or nationality. They are present among civil servants, university professors and graduates, foundation staff, project coordinators and pre-school teachers. They are something we all have to grapple with; but like all viruses, it helps if you are vaccinated before you mount your white horse to do battle with the enemies of poverty and ignorance. Painfully, over a long period of time, I discovered two vaccines which have helped me enormously in this long drawn out struggle. The first of these is what I call the philosophy of ignorance and I want to tell you how I happened on it.

### Philosophy of ignorance

All teachers are born ignorant; I have had the unusual experience of having ignorance thrust upon me at the age of 42. Imagine what it is like to have an honours degree in science, a diploma in education and a licence to teach theology, and to walk into the ghetto world of switchblades, guns and sudden violence in an attempt to 'help' the community. Suddenly, I was a child again, stripped of all pretensions and illusions, confronted by naked hostility and suspicion and having no idea where to begin. There and then, under the inspiration

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of sheer panic, I discovered my philosophy of ignorance. A little voice within me whispered, 'Why not ask *them* how they want you to help?' I leapt upon this as from an Archimedean bathtub and for the last 18 years, it would be true to say that practically everything we have tried to do with the community has been prefaced by the simple question: 'How can we help you?'

It was a short step from this experience to practically institutionalise this basic stance when confronted with a group of people: *never* presume that you know the needs and priorities of people; confess your utter ignorance of their background, the way their minds work, the reasons for their attitudes and ask them how they would like you to help.

#### Attentive listening

The second step is just as crucial: you *listen* to what they say. Not in the abstracted, perfunctory manner of one who is just humouring a child, but with the single-minded intentness of an advocate hanging on to each word of a key witness. Here is how I expressed it in an unpublished manuscript:

First, you get in there and you listen to the people. You listen to them for periods varying from a year to three years before attempting any organised project. In fact, even when you start doing something with them, you never stop listening. You listen until you are tired of listening and then you listen some more. You listen until all the cultural arrogance has been drained from your mind and you really begin to hear the voice of the people as *the* important element in their own development and as far more important than the wonderful schemes and ideas that are turning around in your busy little brain.

Second, you then begin to set up tiny low-cost projects which the people have said they want. You are content with a shoe-string budget which is best covered by the economic resources of the people themselves and you resist the temptation of injecting large sums of money at this stage. Above all, each step is only taken after numerous discussions with the people, thus ensuring their involvement in both the planning and implementation of the project. This is not to say that you totally disregard

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your own views and your own approach; far from it. But these views, this approach, is simply one which you allow to impinge gently on the views and approaches of the community, both sides having respect for the other, both sharing in the learning process.

Third, you let the thing grow in its own way and in its own time. Sometimes it remains a small but significant project; other times, it simply leaps into prominence as an alternative educational model. Most of the time, it oscillates between these extremes; not infrequently, it collapses. Whatever the result, there is nearly always a distinct but intangible result in terms of the total development process among the community, in which you are merely one of many influences and which stretches over a much longer period of time than your involvement with the people.

### **Respectful intervention**

I think it is only when you have adopted this philosophy of ignorance, established a listening stance as an integral part of your approach and banished cultural arrogance (at least to some extent) that you can be given a clean bill of health and declared fit to interfere in the lives of other people, through a process which I call respectful intervention. Here is how it works in practice.

You are a man who has decided to do some community work in a ghetto area. You have no illusions about the task. The mixture of hostility, cynicism and amusement which you can read in the faces of the group facing you is an uncomfortable reminder that you are not the first or even the twentieth person who has sat with them to attempt to 'help' them. They have seen it all before and the attitude which comes across is: how long will this one last and to what extent can we rip him off before he goes?

So you ask the now traditional Servol question: 'How can I help you?' and you are given a variety of requests, some of which are genuine, others being more in the nature of a test to see whether *you* are genuine. You are careful to promise nothing except that you will try. In fact you recognise that the less you say at this stage, the better; actions speak louder than words.

You come back a few days later to report on the homework given you by the group: you have obtained jobs for 'Big Red', 'Shooter' and 'Ball'; you have secured the use of a school hall for the group to have a fundraising dance and one department store will knock half the price off a football if the group comes up with the other half. There is grudging agreement that you have tried and the dialogue deeper: what they *really* want is a basketball court! You return two weeks later with plans drawn, an estimate of \$4,000 and with the demand that they must raise half. Loud protestations, much cursing: the man is mad, we are poor people, why can't he get some of his rich friends to donate it? Patiently, you explain that this has to be community effort and that we (it has become *we*) can raise \$800 from the dance and another \$1,200 from some other function. What function? A raffle, and eventually it is agreed that if you collect three prizes, they will sell the tickets. Two months later we have \$2,000, you have twisted a businessman's arm to put the other \$2,000 forward and the court is built.

In all the discussions and the actual work you keep on listening to what they have to say about themselves, their lives, their hopes, their fears. You are trying to get under their skin to try to understand the reason for their behaviour patterns, their strengths and their weaknesses. You are fully aware that you are only scratching the surface and that deeper things just follow, but patience and working at the speed of the community are vital factors. Each time a goal has been achieved they come up with another scheme, another idea, which is what they *really* want. Because what they *really* want is to be independent men and women in their own right, to make their own decisions and to have access to those structures of power, influence and finance which are essential factors in getting anything accomplished in this modern world. They recognise however that, for the moment, they can only work through you and through small projects; but it is their hope (and it should be yours) that one day they will be able to function on their own without any help from you or from anyone else.

### Respectful intervention in practice

If only this commitment to respectful intervention would be the guiding force in the relationships between all those groups who interact with each other to help people. Let me

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give you a few examples from my own experience; I am sure that all of you can contribute similar examples out of your own work experience.

Take the project which is presently a joint venture between the Ministry of Education and Servol and which involves the setting up of 200 community-based early childhood centres and 50 adolescent development centres in Trinidad and Tobago over the period 1987 to 1990.

The first 12 months involved a number of major and minor skirmishes with the Ministry of Education as to who was in charge of the project. As you well know, government bureaucracies do not take kindly to voluntary organisations barging in on their territory. We solved that by agreeing that Servol would act as *agent* for the Ministry and run the project, providing the Ministry with regular comprehensive reports. The situation is still finely balanced but it is working.

The same respect can be seen in the manner in which the project was conceived and implemented *vis-à-vis* the community. The first step was an advertisement in the papers, inviting those communities who wanted an early childhood or adolescent development centre in their area to apply in writing. Next, they were asked to do three things: form themselves into a village board of education, provide an adequate structure for the centre and nominate four candidates for training as teachers, out of whom we would select two for training. Acting as agent of the Ministry of Education, we would train these teachers, supply the centre with furniture and equipment and pay a monthly subsidy to the village board of education to help pay teachers' salaries.

You will note how finely balanced is the relationship between the community and Servol, with our organisation doing only those things for the community which it needs; training of teachers, funding part of the salaries. The village board is *seen* to be the authority in charge of the project with support from Servol. This is reinforced by allowing the village boards of education to be seen as the legal entity which pays the salaries of teachers, though we subsidise these salaries by monthly transfers of money to the accounts of the boards. Finally, the balance is completed in that, at

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an annual general meeting, the parents of the pupils are the ones who elect a new board by vote.

**Attitude of foundations to voluntary organisations**

Respectful intervention should also be the hallmark which stamps the attitude of foundations to voluntary organisations. I can assure you that all the foundations we deal with do intervene respectfully in our work. We have no truck with the other kind. Here is an example of how both parties in a relationship can falter at times and how sturdy independence on both sides and a genuine respect for the other can, over a period of time, draw the people concerned into a course of action which is mutually acceptable.

When the Bernard van Leer Foundation made contact with Servol in 1971, it offered sympathetic encouragement and generous financial support for our work. It was also mentioned to me that I had to provide something called 'evaluation' at the end of three years. I did not really understand what the Foundation was talking about, so I put it on a back burner. There was much more important work to be done. The Foundation insisted, I demurred. It insisted again; firmly this time, pointing out that the purpose of evaluation was to help me to see where I was going and if I did not feel competent to carry out the study, why didn't I ask the University to help. Reluctantly, I did, still unconvinced. Today, I stand before you to tell you that I understand the importance of evaluation and would not dream of implementing a project without including it.

Let us go on a bit. Sometime between the Colombia and the Zimbabwe seminars, Dudley and I sensed that something was going on within the Bernard van Leer Foundation, something which involved a radical change in its customary respectful approach to projects and project leaders. It became apparent when, during the Colombia seminar, one of its representatives produced a model for evaluation of projects which was almost a replica of the map of the London Underground. Dudley, Marta, Glen<sup>5</sup> and I discussed it privately; the Foundation couldn't possibly be serious. It was. Once we realised that, we simply tore it to pieces,

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<sup>5</sup> The reference is to Marta Arango and Glen Nimnicht from *Centro de Educación y Desarrollo Humano (CINDE)* in Colombia.



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saying outright that it was unworkable. For two years, the entire problem hung in the balance and we recognised the seriousness of it. It meant a total swing in the relationship between the Foundation and project coordinators from one of respectful intervention to one based on cultural arrogance.

One day, Dudley rang me from Jamaica; 'Gerry, my boy, the forces of righteousness have conquered.' Common sense had prevailed, we were back in business.

I give this example to illustrate to you that respectful intervention does not mean tiptoeing around each other. Good friends are entitled to disagree, to press their point of view, even to quarrel. The important thing is that we listen to each other, we respect each other and out of this respectful listening comes a new vision, an enriched attitude to helping people.

**A question of power** Carefully examined, you will realise that the basic issue which underpins the various ideas I have placed before you is that of *power*. Whether we like it or not, those who control and run this world of ours are those who possess and exercise power. The powerless stand defeated and apathetic while decisions are taken about them which seriously affect their lives and on which they are not even consulted.

It is also good to remember that power is a relative thing and that people may be powerless in one area of life and very powerful in another. For instance, governments have tremendous power but they can become totally powerless if an entire population stands up one day and says: 'we have had enough, we refuse to obey', as the British experienced in India. Foundations have enormous financial power and in the face of this, voluntary organisations are like poor people: on the other hand, these same foundations are powerless to implement projects without the help of indigenous leaders. The latter in turn are seen to have both organisational and financial power by grassroots communities but the decision of village people not to cooperate in a project renders the local agencies helpless. University-trained people are very powerful in the realm of ideas, hypotheses and dissertations. I must confess that for many years they intimidated me until I realised that practically

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none of them had ever been called upon to test their blueprints on the stage of real life and had no practical experience of real life situations.

**Sharing power** The purpose of attentive listening and respectful intervention is thus seen as a means of sharing and distributing this power in a more equitable fashion. This approach to development builds bridges between the people who have money, those who have ideas, those who have managerial and entrepreneurial skills and, most of all, those whose lives are going to be affected by the decisions taken on the project mounted. Peter Berger makes the point that since it is the masses of people who will either enjoy the benefits of enlightened socio-economic activity or bear the brunt of the suffering brought about by the decisions of woolly headed intellectuals, they should at least have a say in the decisions which affect their lives.

Whenever we 'help' people by doing something *for* them we are telling these people explicitly or implicitly:

You are a weak, ignorant people. You do not even know what is good for you; so we the intelligent, the powerful, will do it for you.<sup>6</sup>

We build houses for people without asking them a single question about what kind of house they would like. We establish neighbourhoods and housing schemes without inviting comment from the community who will be forced to live there. We drag children into schools which look like factories and operate like factories and these factories spew out the finished products ten years afterwards to fend for themselves; and almost *never* are those children asked: 'What would you like to learn? What would you like to do?'

I contend that the object of all our educational and social effort should be to help people take charge of their lives, become active in the process of their own development, understand and participate in those activities which lead them to a long, healthy fulfilling life. To put it simply, we have to give them *power* over their own lives.

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6 Berger, P.L., *Pyramids of Sacrifice*, Penguin Books, New York 1974.

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As Paulo Freire says: 'The important thing is to help men and nations help themselves, to place them in consciously critical confrontation with their problems to make them the agents of their own recuperation.'

Another great thinker, Illich, repeats the same message: 'The poor have always been socially powerless, the increasing reliance on institutional care adds a new dimension to their helplessness; psychological impotence, the inability to fend for themselves.'

I suppose all of you listening to me would agree in general with most of what I am saying. The problem as I see it, is not one of an opposing ideology; rather, it is one of praxis. With the best of intentions, even those of us who are convinced of the wisdom of involving people in decisions which concern their lives, fall short of our ideals time and time again. It is a sad reflection on the extent of our egocentricity, that time and time again we fail to listen to others and to act respectfully towards them. This has led us in Servol to look around for ways and means to help people to acquire and deepen this attitude of respectful intervention. What we have done in fact, is to develop a type of *apprenticeship* in this area.

### Apprenticeship in respectful behaviour

Those of us who have been in contact with the Bernard van Leer Foundation, have always been impressed by the extraordinarily warm relationship that exists between the Foundation and its Network of project leaders all over the world. Without hesitation, I attribute this to the deep sense of compassion displayed by Willem Welling and Freddie Wood in their dealing with people. From where did this come? Partly, no doubt, because the two men possess an innate compassion for people. I am convinced, however, that is largely due to the fact that they have had personal contact, not only with project coordinators, but with very grassroots members of organisations. I have a distinct recollection of Willem and Freddie sitting around a table in a small room in a ghetto area in Trinidad called Laventille, having serious conversations with a group of soldiers and sailors who comprised the entire staff of Servol in 1971. There is no doubt whatever in my mind that close contact with grassroots people is one of the most important instruments in excising cultural arrogance and replacing it by respectful intervention.

Another example will illustrate this. In 1974, I established another organisation called FUND-AID designed to guarantee loans at commercial banks for communities and groups who wished to implement projects of their own but who had no collateral. The board consists mainly of senior officials of banks and lending agencies and I was a little dismayed to find that several project proposals coming from community groups whom I knew to be reliable, were rejected by the board as being 'not viable'. Acting on an impulse, I asked these highly respectable three-piece-suited bankers to visit the rejected projects and to enter into dialogue with the groups concerned. At the next meeting of the board, each and every one of them said words to this effect: 'All my banking experience tells me that the projects are not viable and I do not know why I am saying this but I recommend that we give them a try.' All the projects turned out to be successful and all loans were faithfully repaid.

What had happened? Very simply, the sheer earnestness of the groups, their quiet dignity, their sense of purpose, had entered into the souls of these bankers and had stirred something intangible within them, thus effecting a total turnaround in their attitudes.

Do you know how we in Servol train instructors for our adolescent development programme? We literally guide them through an apprenticeship in attentive listening and respectful intervention. They enter their teacher training course simultaneously with 80 adolescents who have enrolled in the programme and for the first month they are under rigid orders to sit at the back of whatever training session is being conducted by an experienced Servol instructor, to look, to listen and to be absolutely silent. They are not allowed to participate in the sessions for that month and each and every one has told us subsequently that it was one of the most difficult things they had ever done in their lives: to shut their mouths for one month. Our comment to them is: do you understand now the experience of adolescents who have to stay absolutely silent while teachers do all the talking?

During the second and third months they are permitted to help the instructors in gradually increasing ways and in the

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fourth month they are allowed to actually conduct some of the sessions. Only then are they turned loose on a group of adolescents in a community Life Centre with the expectation that they will assume a respectful attitude to their young charges.

### Experiential training

Now, I have a hard question to put to foundations in general. Do you really expect your young programme specialists, most of whom have university diplomas on which the ink has not yet dried, to become effective in their work without some type of apprenticeship to one or other of the projects they are monitoring? Do you honestly think that these young people can overcome class and culture shock from within the walls of a foundation's office? They are filled with so many brilliant ideas which have emerged from the 'bull sessions' of university graduates who are expert at solving the world's problems over endless cups of coffee; how do you expect them to make the transition from the world of ideas to the world of people without allowing them to make contact with people? Note well, I am not talking about a three day or a four day visit; I am suggesting that they spend between one or two *months* with one particular project, breathing in not the rarefied atmosphere of the upper stratosphere but inhaling the heavy air of a group of people working closely together to make an idea work, witnessing the daily difficulties of managers and the endless stream of problems and crises, experiencing the physical and emotional exhaustion of what is involved in what we call so innocently a 'community' project. Just suppose one such programme specialist spent a couple of months with Marta and Glen in Colombia, another with Servol, another with one or other of the Jamaican projects, a fourth in Kenya and so on. I am quite convinced that such a move will pay dividends. I wager, these young idealists will return to their posts enlightened, sobered and far more respectful of the very people whom they are supposed to help and guide.

In a nutshell, what we have discovered in this approach to training, is that it must of necessity be *experiential*. It simply cannot be learned from books or even from the experience of working in one's own country. It is all well summarised in a plaque which hangs on the wall of the Servol Centres and which reads as follows.

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Go To The People.  
Live Among Them. Learn From Them.  
Love Them. Serve Them. Plan With Them.  
Start With What They Know.  
Build On What They Have.  
Not Piece-Meal But Integrated Approach.  
Not Show-Case But Pattern.  
Not Relief But Release.  
Learn By Doing.  
And Teach By Showing.

Lest you think that I am spouting a lot of high blown philosophy which is impractical and impossible to implement, let me illustrate how we try to practice what we preach by quoting from a letter I wrote to a young Swiss national in 1982. Full of enthusiasm, he had volunteered to work with Servol for a year, asking only that we pay him a nominal salary and offer him board and lodging. I quote:

Thank you for your letter of September 24, 1982, and the accompanying documents which are all in order. Let me try to explain the situation to you but before doing so, let me hasten to assure you that I am very much impressed by your approach and your obvious desire to contribute to the developing world. So please let nothing I say in the letter give you the impression that I have anything but the highest regard for you. It is just that the problem of helping a Third World country is far more complex than you think. In fact the letters we have already exchanged in themselves constitute an introduction to development education on your part!

- (a) To be very blunt, we do not *need* you. You have no specialised skills which are lacking in Trinidad, in fact I could find a hundred people tomorrow who could fill the place you have offered to hold with Servol, all of whom would be more culturally adapted to the work and people, though (I suspect), few who measure up to your sense of dedication and commitment. But when you leave in July, you will leave no gap in Servol, nor will we replace you with anyone.

(b) Why then am I prepared to have you come to us at all? Here comes shock number two: because I think *you* will benefit from the educational experience. You see one of the problems of living in a developed country is that tendency to transpose one's values and priorities to a Third World situation. The humbling thing about your anticipated experience with Servol is that it will probably take you two months to *understand* the type of English the grassroots people speak, a further two months to become accepted as part of the project and another six months to even begin to understand the problems of the people and country. If at the end of your stint in Servol you have learned how to listen attentively to people and completely put aside your pre-conceived ideas and convictions, you will have made a tremendous start in your development education. It always comes as a rather traumatic shock for a European or North American to discover that they have more to *learn* from a Third World situation than to *contribute*.

He came, he spent six months with us and I think he learned quite a lot.

**The Servol creed** About five years ago, we in Servol, realising that we had spent 13 years in the field, felt compelled to express how we felt about our work through the formulation of a succinct creed. Here is how we expressed it:

- 1) *We believe* that every child conceived in the womb of a woman, is a most beautiful human being who comes into this world 'trailing clouds of glory' as Wordsworth puts it, that is, filled with an immense potential for joy, for happiness, for ecstasy.
- 2) *We believe* that the inability of so many children to realise this potential is due to a number of interacting factors, genetic and environmental, which seriously affect their lives.
- 3) *We believe* that in a very large number of instances, children can be helped by relatively simple, inexpensive

programmes to overcome the negative effect of these factors.

- 4) *We believe* that after basic nutritional needs have been met, the single most destructive factor in the life of a child is a poor self-image and a low self-esteem.
- 5) *We believe* that three important institutions are largely responsible for the self-image and self-esteem of a child: the family, the school and the church.
- 6) *We believe* that we in Servol have, as our task, to influence these three institutions positively, so that their effect on the self-image and self-esteem of children, will become more and more positive.

We have found that this 'creed' has been very useful in helping us to chart our course and establish priorities.

Is it not time for the Bernard van Leer Foundation to attempt a similar exercise? Twenty years and ten international seminars have passed and a great deal of collective wisdom has been accumulated in the process. I think it is fitting that this wisdom should be carefully distilled, reduced to a series of brief statements on policy, methodology and praxis and circulated among members of the network as a clear indication of how the Foundation sees itself and its work. The history of organisations (in particular ecclesiastical organisations) has shown that this type of proclamation is extremely valuable not only for the voluntary agencies with which the Foundation works, but also to ensure that there is a shared vision among Foundation staff which has grown out of its years of experience and can act as a beacon to them. It can also serve as a loadstone to pull the organisation back to its first principles when ever there is the danger of straying.

**Conclusion** All of us, at some time or other, have looked out of a window and thought: 'What a beautiful world it would be if everyone saw things as clearly as I did and did exactly what I told them to do.' The trouble is that people, the two-legged kind which inhabit this earth, keep getting in the way of our project proposals, organisational charts, graphs and evaluation



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studies. Thank God they do! This may make life much more complicated but it always saves it from being dehumanised. Failure to recognise this is going to increase the suffering of the poor and disadvantaged, in that it will make us opt for immediate, external results rather than pinning our faith on the ability of very ordinary people to solve their own problems with a little help from friends.

A number of years ago, Dudley was paying one of his periodic visits to Servol and we were discussing the merits and demerits of a participatory type of education which placed a lot of importance on dialogue between teacher and pupils. At that moment, a five year old child called Ashunda came up to us. Ashunda is truly a Servol child in that both her father and mother entered Servol's Adolescent Programme in the 1970s, graduated, obtained jobs and returned to work with Servol as instructors. From the age of two months, Ashunda was placed in one of the Servol day nurseries and later spent two years in the early childhood centre at our Beetham Life Centre and Caribbean Life Centre. During this time, she made herself known to every instructor, knew them all by name and loved nothing better than to visit the workshops and classrooms. She was now spending her first week in primary school and when we asked her how was it, she answered 'Enchanting!' She then told us that the school had been brought to a Church to celebrate Mass as a fitting opening of the new school year. We asked her what she thought of this and the little lady answered with unbelievable aplomb: 'It was an interesting experience'.

When she ran off Dudley turned to me and said: 'Well, Reverend Father, after that, can there be the slightest doubt that children who come under the guidance of trained teachers, enlightened parents and a caring community hold the future of the world in their hands?' I had no answer; Dudley, as usual, had the last word.

## Summary Report and Conclusions

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I. THE YOUNG CHILD AND THE FAMILY: MANAGING THE SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

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1. Parents, children and their communities strongly influence one another. The environment in which parents live can support or distort their lives, can determine many of their values, and can act either as a source of security and strength, or as a restriction on their full development. In turn, parents can influence the community both as individuals and as members of a group. They can contribute to developing the community's sense of values and its priorities, the level of support it gives individual families, as well as modifying the degree to which the community restricts and controls them.

2. Bearing this in mind, virtually all grassroots efforts to provide early childhood education and care within deprived communities, regardless of cultural or geographical settings, reveal a totally inequitable burden of work, responsibility and stress carried by women – notably mothers. Frequently they must act as both *providers* for their communities and *carers* for their children. Increasingly women are being left to undertake those tasks in isolation, while often being deprived of the levers of power which affect and control resources.

**Harsh physical environments**

3. These social factors, with deep cultural, socio-economic and traditional roots, are often coupled with harsh physical environments and, as a result, prove a threat not only to the well-being and stability of whole communities and their way of life, but endanger the lives of virtually whole national populations.

4. To this depressing scenario has to be added the often negative outcomes of human activities – including traditional practices such as over-grazing, the destruction of forests for

wood and grazing land, the pollution of water resources – urban neglect and the growth of slums, as well as the prevalence of human conflict, turning an already hazardous physical ecosystem into a positively hostile environment for young children and their families. Such hazards inevitably bring in their wake further threats: soil erosion, agricultural decline and rampant disease. All of this adds up to a desperate struggle for survival in the context of wasting land resources.

5. Government policies – such as the introduction of cash cropping to meet the demand for exports and foreign currency earnings, the insistence on enforcing arbitrary political boundaries that often trap communities within impoverished environments, and attempts to stimulate accelerated economic growth to meet international debt repayments at the expense of socially-oriented programmes – can often contribute to this cycle of deprivation of the social and physical environments in which families have to rear their children. The late twentieth century is, for too many, a hard place in which to bring up children.

#### Cuts in social services

6. In many parts of the world, not only in the so-called developed countries, there is a pronounced trend in the policies of governments to cut back spending on the social sector. This implies an overall reduction of national resources going towards mothers and their families. Under the general guise of ‘targeting’ at-risk families more effectively, these policies employ the arguments of cost-effectiveness to reduce the flow of resources to families. In this respect, there appears to be a trend in many countries to revert to the ‘medical model’ of community support, by identifying specific groups of families in need, offering them time-limited and cash-limited help, and then withdrawing. Such an approach represents a swing away from an examination of the root causes of poverty towards an occasionally facile stress on instant solutions, frequently divorced from the contexts in which they originated.

7. The world also faces a growing problem – as the recent *Guidelines on Refugee Children*, issued by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has highlighted – of unaccompanied or abandoned children; of children who have been simply left to seek their own survival, orphaned,

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abducted, or who have run away. Many of them are the innocent victims of conflicts. The special vulnerability of these 'street children' calls for special technologies and strategies; the tracing of parents or relatives, fostering and adoption procedures, the creation of appropriate hostels and homes, and many others besides. Above all, these children need to be given a positive psychological identity; they need to be needed.

8. It becomes clear that a powerful set of factors is moving against the maintenance and sustainability of the family as a prime social structure in many parts of the world, in which children can find their identity, root their initial attachments and subsequent stability, and from which they can move out to explore the external world.

#### The extended family

9. At the same time, we are living in an era where many of the traditional assumptions about the concept of 'family' are being challenged and are changing. Some of these changes relate to the supposed virtues of the extended family, networks which can have both negative as well as positive features, including inter-generational conflict, interference in members' lives, stress from over-close proximity. Indeed, it can be questioned whether intense extended family life is functional or dysfunctional for the growth and development of individuals who grow up within it. The belief that the extended family is necessarily the best provider of child care has to be considered with some caution.

10. Examples of claustrophobic extended family environments come from Israel, where in the context of a society in transition, grandmothers can be both intrusive and interfering, as well as supportive; from Singapore, where families living in crowded physical circumstances suffer considerable stress; and from West Germany, where in the Turkish communities, the extended family itself becomes a weapon against considering the real place of children in the community and in meeting their needs. In Israel, again, members of immigrant communities who may have originally come from extended families now find themselves dislocated and with no visible family support, finding difficulty in adapting to a very different lifestyle.

11. Even so, it may be necessary to find some forms of family support which re-create to some degree the extended family model which has contributed so much to the strength of many communities. There must be ways of ensuring, for example, that every mother has her own relatives and close friends available at the birth of a child, providing her with the social, psychological and physical support in the early months of her infant's life. The isolation of new parents in many of today's societies is an indictment of those societies, and given the calcification of many State services, the need exists to ensure that kinship and support are available to new parents.

### Supporting family life

12. It is against this changing, threatening and often intolerant social and physical background that programmes which seek to empower local communities, to focus on early childhood education and care, and to support family life must operate. In doing so, it has to be stressed that such programmes do not simply address the issue of child survival but are equally about child development, and that to tackle this wider agenda, they need to direct their attention to the totality of the child's environment.

13. In supporting family life, it needs to be recognised that there are today many variations on the 'family' composition, including not only nuclear and extended families, but also structures based on different alignments and kinship ties, such as reconstituted or 'blended' families. The problem for many families therefore lies less in, say, the absence of a father figure, as in the composition of the family group *per se*. It is the experience of the Young Families Now project in Scotland that, for some women, not having fathers around is positively helpful in that far from being supportive, they can act as an additional burden on women in terms of needing both emotional support and physical care. In their absence, it can often be easier for women to derive their own support from other sources – usually other women. This, nevertheless, has a second outcome; it reinforces the marginalisation of men rather than integrating them into the family caring role.

14. Children's needs can often best be met by networks of care, and these vary across cultures and societies. Even

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in the case of very young children, such networks challenge the popular notion that they should only be cared for by their natural mothers. This is linked to the importance of feelings of security and attachment. If the quality of care is good, then it does not appear to matter whether the care is home-based or not, and the child appears to cope with a variety of situations and people.

#### A holistic approach

15. Bearing in mind all these factors, it is possible to recognise that there has been a gradual but perceptible shift in the thrust of family support programmes, from their initial concern with educational factors directed at the child and focusing primarily on teachers and the school curricula, towards a much broader, 'holistic' approach which increasingly addresses all the key variables that affect a child's social and physical environment.

16. There are profound considerations to be borne in mind in seeking to put these ideas into operation. Should programmes have a single focus or should they seek to address many goals? Single-focus programmes have the virtue that they concentrate on identifiable and verifiable aims, such as language development, nutrition, literacy and so on. Yet even when they are well-run, the evidence seems to suggest that they tend to have only limited success over a short duration.

17. The general aim of more broadly-based community development approaches is not only to capacitate individual families and their communities, but in doing so, to enhance the positive relationships between adults and children and improve the whole climate of child development.

18. This broad approach tells us much about the complexity of human development. Parents and children are multi-dimensional in their interests, emotions, skills and resources. Their interaction is also a complex and dynamic process, constantly changing. It is therefore possibly naive to expect parents to focus on just one aspect of their own personalities, or on one role such as parenting, perhaps at the expense of other equally important elements of their own personalities.

19. But to advocate that we should deal with the 'whole' child and the 'whole' parent also poses considerable difficulties. Programmes which seek to support all needs – the holistic approach – may end by achieving very little, precisely because of the complexity that they are seeking to address. The focus may become so diffuse that goals become vague and undefined, and critical areas are ignored in a welter of conflicting demands.

20. On the other hand, programmes which concentrate exclusively on children and their development, or on women and their development, tend also to have limited success, precisely because they do not focus on the relationship between the two. A better approach seems to be ensuring that a programme is multi-focused in both its content and its targets, so that the capacitation of mothers (and fathers) are part of the programme's main aims.

#### The marginalised male

21. That being the case, it is important to recognise that in a wide range of societies and communities there is a growing phenomenon of the 'marginalised' young male who, apart from being involved in many casual but often also long-term relationships, apparently accepts no responsibility for the outcomes of those liaisons in terms of either child care, nurture or family support.

22. Within the Caribbean, many deprived communities report an increased prevalence of teenage pregnancies in which the father plays no subsequent role. Moreover, families of boys involved may prevent them from taking such responsibility, while at the same time stigmatising girls for their early pregnancies. One immediate effect of this unequal process is that while pregnant or single-parent young mothers are usually barred from the formal educational system, males are allowed to pursue their studies unfettered by familial concerns, thereby increasing the gulf between themselves and young women in the community and so contributing to the vulnerability of young, child-rearing women.

23. In many societies, young men are not merely 'invisible' in their role as carers and providers, but are becoming a positive liability to their own families. Some



. African countries report that young men leave their rural families for the cities in search of work; when they fail, they return to their villages to obtain further funds to continue their search, once again leaving their families impoverished and often with more mouths to feed. Such an increasing and unequal burden involves even grandparents, who are then asked to supplement the resources of the families. In this way, the 'missing' males create stress patterns throughout the community, while the growing number of children which arise from their transient relationships add to the burden carried by women.

24. Many other communities report similar processes at work. In Latin America, there is a deep-rooted cultural bias towards the male role which accepts that men should play no part in the nurturing function, and which actually militates against male 'interference'. Any attempt to alter that cultural pattern might well be perceived as an intrusion into what is regarded as a female preserve.

25. The issue of male 'irresponsibility' is a complex one. Often it has its origins in traditional social patterns, such as the 'marginalisation' of men from matriarchal family networks, which have been made irrelevant by material changes in society. To class it as male 'irresponsibility' can be refuted by the evidence of projects, such as Servol in Trinidad and Tobago, which have set out to involve young males in their programmes and which have linked their development to those of the very young. When given the opportunity and encouragement to care for these young children, young men do so with enthusiasm and tenderness. What frequently militates against their involvement is a peer culture, reinforced by parents, which claims that such an acknowledgement of their familial responsibilities and such a display of their 'caring' nature, will bring 'shame' on their families. Thus the role of young men in many of these deprived communities has become an ambivalent and marginal one, moving between a still powerful cultural stereotype and a reality that includes poverty, unemployment, lack of status and an often undefined social role.

26. What is not in dispute is that the outcome of these patterns places the burden of being both provider and

caregiver increasingly on women who, despite these pressures, often themselves enjoy little status within their own communities, are drained physically by the daily demands made upon them, and are in no position to respond to exhortations to improve their parenting role.

**Increasing burden on women**

27. The increasing economic as well as care-giving burden is illustrated by the case of Nigeria where, in the Yoruba area of the country (with a population of some 25 million people) women are now involved in 45 per cent of the agricultural production, as well as 100 per cent of the food processing, and all of the child care within the region. The result in many societies is a rising level of child labour. In Colombia, as many as 3.5 million young children may be at work within the informal economy.

28. The unequal balance of educational provision in most countries has its own detrimental effects on parenting. The educational focus is doubly distorted, first by not ensuring that girls receive an educational experience as complete as that of boys – necessary not merely because of women's roles as potential mothers, but equally for their own self-development – and second, by its elitist bias in that, in most countries, tertiary education swallows up an unjustified proportion of the education budget. By contrast, the relatively poor State of Kerala in southern India spends as much as 86 per cent of its total budget on primary and secondary education. The result of this policy is that in Kerala, 75 per cent of all women complete secondary education. Levels of infant mortality and other health indicators suggest that this area has one of the healthiest and best-educated populations in India.

**Maternal nutrition**

29. One of the major critical areas of concern remains the nutrition of mothers both before and during pregnancy. Many child-bearing women are still physically at risk, first from maternal mortality and second, from malnutrition. They often neglect to feed themselves, giving priority to others in their families. So the nutrition of the mother during the months immediately preceding birth is critical, especially the intake of important micro-nutrients like zinc, which are essential to the well-being of both mother and child. Deficiencies in these trace elements, as well as those of energy-giving and muscle-building protein foodstuffs,

will leave a mother weak and exhausted, and considerably increase the probability that either she or her new baby or both will suffer.

30. What is less emphasised is that the nutrition of young girls, especially between the ages of 10 and 16, is equally vital for their proper physical development. This is particularly if they intend to become mothers, as poor nutrition could place them severely at risk from the strains of child-bearing.

#### Cultural beliefs

31. The fate of teenage as well as other mothers is often culturally defined. Often malnutrition itself is brought about, not by a physical shortage of foodstuffs, but by ignorance of the importance of diet. In many regions of Mozambique, for example, it is believed that if a mother eats eggs during pregnancy, childbirth will be difficult and the baby may even be deformed. Such is the power of this lore that women who are found 'guilty' of such conduct are likely to be severely cross-questioned about their behaviour and may even be banished from their communities.

32. Other cultural beliefs, often involving everything from child and female circumcision to initiation rites and dietary practices, also threaten the well-being of women and children. Yet to tamper with such local societal mores without introducing acceptable alternatives would be to threaten the very fabric of often vulnerable cultures which, in other ways, offer an important source of identity for the community.

33. In one Pacific community, all pregnant women are segregated from their community and isolated in a 'women's village' where their diet is dramatically restricted through a series of taboos on particular foods which are considered 'unlucky' for pregnancy. With access to only a limited, and often inappropriate diet, this form of incarceration leads to vast numbers of spontaneous abortions. Of those infants born alive, at least a third fall below the recommended World Health Organisation birth weights – a common phenomenon in many developing countries. Equally important, most mothers exposed to such practices are unable to breastfeed for the first few weeks, so that the reduced birth weight of their babies is compounded by a subsequent lack of adequate nutrition.

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## Benefits of breastfeeding

34. There are also various man-made hazards to health which impede the positive relationships required for a full development of family life within which the child can thrive. Powerful forces are at work which play down the value of breastfeeding and promote alternative and more commercial methods of infant feeding. Sometimes these pressures are abetted by folklore and cultural traditions about diet. For example, among many Indian families, the first three days of lactation are regarded as 'impure', despite the fact that the 'milk' produced then contains some of the most important antibodies to protect infants against many diseases.

35. In many Western countries, it can still be difficult for a woman to breastfeed her child. Breastfeeding takes considerable determination and courage on the part of the mother in the face of campaigns to promote alternative bottle-feeding mixtures, together with a public climate which makes breastfeeding difficult. Few facilities are provided by employers or central services where mothers can feed their babies. This occurs despite all the evidence that breast milk is not only the most nutritious and hygienic infant food, but that it also has an important role to play in immunology, and that the act of breastfeeding can stimulate close bonding between mother and child.

## Importance of diet

36. Increasingly, in many parts of the affluent world, children go hungry because their parents are ill-informed about their needs and unaware of the requirements of a balanced intake of nutrients.

37. Although generally regarded as a subsidiary consideration when discussing health, diet is in fact of such overwhelming importance as to be central to healthy functioning. The quality of a person's nutrition – and this applies particularly to children – plays a large part in building up immunity. Thus, given sufficient nutrients of the right kind, an individual has a good chance of resisting many infections and illnesses. Diet also plays a major role in determining behaviour, especially in children.

38. The 'medical model', which determines much of our thinking about health, tends to see the problem in terms of chance infections and outside factors which need to be

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either avoided or, if caught, to be treated, usually by quick-acting powerful drugs. The view that health is a composite of personal diet, individual lifestyles and their reaction with the surrounding environment, although long-accepted in many traditional societies, is sometimes recognised in theory but seldom acknowledged in practice in many so-called developed countries.

#### Isolation of new mothers

39. But adequate and appropriate nutrition for growing girls and expectant and nursing mothers is not the only factor that impinges on the well-being of the unborn child. It is often forgotten that it is the mother's state of mind, the stresses and emotional anxieties she experiences, that are also transmitted to the developing child, and which to some extent influence her own relationship with that child.

40. In many Western countries, the development of 'high-tech' medical care is tending to regard pregnant women as 'patients' robbed of the right to be involved in the birth process itself. While having the merit of reducing maternal and infant mortality, modern medical practices are also a source of disenfranchisement for women themselves. Traditional forms of giving birth are undervalued, and the practice of giving birth at home is either denied or made very difficult. Yet the choice and setting of a birth is important, as is the degree of control that the mother can exercise over the event because this can often influence her subsequent attitude to her baby.

41. It has still to be recognised, both in economically-developed nations as well as developing ones, that the needs of mothers and their infants are particularly acute in the weeks immediately after birth. Many services and support schemes, as well as families themselves, still appear unaware of the need for long-term support for a mother and her infant, and tend to withdraw within days of the birth experience itself, leaving mothers isolated and without social contact, thereby putting at risk the very bonding process which has been initiated. Such isolating trends are encouraged by a growing move towards individualism in many societies, at the expense of traditional communal values and beliefs. One dramatic outcome of such a trend is that, even in countries with well-developed community support

systems, mothers' social networks – one of the most potent forms of individual support – are reduced, leading in turn to more maternal depression and an increasing vulnerability for their children.

42. Governments often add to these threats to family stability by their own tendency to impose 'top-down' strategies and services which aim to produce homogeneity among their populations. Cultural differences are minimised instead of celebrated and ethnic minorities are marginalised and abused.

#### Survival for what?

43. The danger in the struggle to overcome high rates of infant and maternal mortality is that stress is frequently placed on simple, low-cost techniques aimed at ensuring child survival, which run the risk of devaluing the caring and nurturing role of the family. The question has to be asked: survival for what? So that children may scavenge their lives away on the detritus of a throwaway society? So that they may spend their existence in leaking corrugated iron shacks, perched atop a refuse tip, and call them 'home'? So that they may beg on the streets of a modern city, marginalised to the point of invisibility; or perhaps be commercially adopted by rich families suffering from a 'baby shortage'?

44. Adoption itself is, of course, not the issue. The world faces a growing problem of unaccompanied and abandoned children whose special vulnerability calls for special strategies. There is a tendency in some strife-torn countries to bring such children to large urban encampments, creating anonymous ghettos of the 'lost and the dispossessed'. Essentially, these children need to recover emotionally from the traumas they have undergone, in a warm, stimulating but above all sustaining and caring environment where a new sense of belonging can be fostered. Everything must be done to give back to these children their most precious possession – the family – even if that family is an adoptive one.

45. To develop successfully, young children need to live within a community of stable carers who themselves must have the necessary resources to provide a nurturing environment. In the understandable and reasonable concern for survival there nevertheless lurks the danger that the

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more complex needs of healthy child development may be ignored or downgraded, and that attention is thereby diverted from the central role that parents and communities fulfil.

- Community programmes**
46. To resist these trends and foster the basic relationships between parents, their children and the wider community, experience has shown that strategies which foster local involvement and commitment, and which address the totality of the environment are the most likely to have long-term success.
47. Programmes which promote the improvement of the community's health; and which are implemented and controlled by the community itself, may therefore have an important role in the fundamental task of reducing the rates of infant and maternal mortality. Primary health care policies at the local level may be an essential first step, and are more likely to be successful if they are combined with elements of education, communication and public awareness.
48. Programmes which seek to improve the actual physical environment may also have a great impact on local health indicators, as they may mitigate some of the factors which give rise to illness in the first place. On the Pacific coast of Colombia four coastal villages were infested with malaria. One aspect of the project there was to reduce the incidence of the disease by attacking the malaria-breeding environment, illustrating the 'first things first' principle.
49. What such strategies demand, in essence, is that they build from the grassroots upwards. The work, the energy, the creativity has essentially to come from those who have become aware of their condition. They cannot be imposed from outside by administrations or bureaucracies. Services must be low-cost, in that they have to be both affordable locally, as well as practical and appropriate. They have to be culturally-grounded. They must be couched in a community's own language and planned on its terms. They also have to be democratic, allowing access to new knowledge by families themselves, offering access to all. They must be organic, containing the seeds for further development. And they must be on a human scale, so that people can feel comfortable and in control of them.

**Empowerment** 50. What these principles demonstrate is a strategy for local 'empowerment'; placing people in control of their own local resources, their own lives, enabling them to make their own choices, as well as strengthening their own economic environment. In the past, attempts to empower communities often failed to ensure that local people also had control over their own economic destiny.

51. 'Empowerment' in this sense is about many things. At the individual level, it seeks to release people from dependence on external resources towards a reliance on their own internal resources. At the family level, it seeks to set free the family from the dominance of professional interference and to allow families to make real decisions and exercise choice. At the community level, it is not only about raising consciousness, but also about enabling local people to harness local resources and adapt services to meet their own needs, as well as to voice those needs. As such, empowerment has both economic and political dimensions.

52. For communities, the path to empowerment is neither quick nor easy, and it carries with it the seeds of unpredictability. Yet experience has shown that unless local people can be supported long enough, and with enough creativity and sensitivity to believe that their futures lie in their own hands, no outside intervention will in the long term, do the job for them.

53. Empowerment is not a panacea. It does not solve everything. It is about making people stronger, where once they were weak. It is about making them feel good about themselves, where once they felt negative. And it is through their own new-found image of themselves that they can begin to set their own agendas for action. Empowerment has been described as 'enabling people to acknowledge their own problems, and to take responsibility for them'. By taking that responsibility, they will also want to find solutions for the problems.

54. The fundamental basis of empowerment is a positive view of humanity. It says, in effect, that if people have a choice, they will choose to develop and care for their children; will want to nurture them and have ambitions for



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them. It is only when people are depressed, dehumanised, dependent on others and hopeless that they may, reluctantly, erase the well-being of their children from their own agendas, and pursue personal survival. Empowerment says 'I can' where before there was a conviction that 'I can't'. It says that human beings are essentially positive, and that if only people have the opportunity, the freedom, the resources, the knowledge and the confidence to shape their own lives, they will do so by giving priority to their own children.

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## II. CARE AND EDUCATION FOR THE YOUNG CHILD: EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE WAYS

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55. Long before formal systems of early childhood care and education developed, families throughout the world used their personal, domestic and community resources to care for, rear and nurture their children. A vast variety of styles and methods of personal and community care remain, but industrialisation, coupled with the breakdown of many traditional forms of living as populations have migrated to the cities, has resulted in major changes. Related shifts such as the transformation of subsistence farming to cash-crop economies in many societies has increased social and physical mobility, and rapid political changes have occurred in many areas. While the processes have evolved differently in various settings, clear patterns have emerged in both industrialised societies as well as in traditional ones.

56. In the past, young children were often brought up within an extended family environment which included parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents. Many adults, particularly the females, were often caregivers. With new population and occupational patterns, many children today are being brought up outside the extended family network. In Singapore, for example, the breakdown of traditional extended family arrangements has significantly decreased contact between grandparents and children. In many societies, older siblings, if they are within the family circle at all, tend to be less involved in the responsibility of looking after younger brothers and sisters. Other changes in family patterns are also emerging. In the United States, for example, the percentage of black female-headed families with no husband present rose from 21.9 per cent of all black families in 1960 to 41.9 per cent in 1983. The changing dynamics between men and women is having an impact on the structure of families across the globe.

57. Another factor creating changes in the patterns of child-rearing and care is the increased participation of women in paid work outside the home environment, often brought about because of the rising costs of supporting a family. This has meant that parents must devise alternative forms of care for their young children during the frequently long periods of their separation. The opportunity to choose to work outside the home is important for women, frequently offering positive consequences for both the women themselves and their families. However, in both rural and urban settings, difficulties arise for the children, the parents, and ultimately the community, when no appropriate alternative arrangements exist.

**Day care provision**

58. The whole issue of day care provision – notably in the technologically-developed countries – is bedeviled by incongruities and contradictions. It is bound up with traditional (and often male-dominated) views about the role of women in society, about conflicting views of the needs of children themselves, and about the extent to which resources can or should be allocated to this area of activity.

59. While many societies have made gestures towards the concept of equality of opportunity between the sexes, and some have even made determined efforts within their own national policies to promote such a concept, most have singularly failed to do more than pay lip-service to the idea. Women throughout the world retain the prime responsibility for the care of young children – some for ideological reasons; many from choice; others through socio-economic circumstances over which they have no control. As a result, for many parents, particularly those in industrialised countries, child care and parenting are permeated with a sense of guilt. Either the mother should not be going out to work and leaving her child with someone else, or she should be providing materially better for her child by working. Societies where work and child care are combined in a natural, informal arrangement – largely in rural communities – may yet have the most amicable solution from which we can all learn. At the same time, it is clear that modern industrial societies will have to evolve new forms of care.

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60 As more families leave the countryside and flock to the cities, with their sharp divisions between domestic and commercial life, traditional 'solutions' become increasingly impractical. Indeed, the simple matter of transportation time between work and home can itself present great difficulties for working parents.

The needs of parents

61. One of the major challenges that therefore faces all debates about the nature of day care is whether that provision can genuinely reconcile the needs of parents as people – with their own aspirations – while at the same time providing appropriate, high-quality care which involves parents and does not disenfranchise them. The development of 'user friendly' alternatives therefore becomes a priority.

62. Some forms of highly-institutionalised day care provision tend to confirm for parents the belief that others are more competent than themselves to look after their children. Overly rigid requirements imposed by the State can lead to situations where only wealthier communities have the resources to sustain programmes. Expensive and inflexible demands regarding staff training and deployment, equipment and space can exclude entire communities from access to such services. (It should be noted that these problems can exist in both centre-based as well as home-based settings.) Likewise, some systems superimpose models of child care which are frequently based on experiences elsewhere, which are alien to the community, and may represent foreign ideological concepts of child care and, indeed, of the nature of childhood itself.

63. Is the wholesale adoption of Western day care models not simply a form of new colonialism, the more insidious because it is couched in the language of psychology, and hence permeated with an apparently 'scientific' value system? Terms like 'free play', 'problem solving', 'creativity' and 'bonding' may embody universalities, or they may be culture-bound. Hence concepts which are accepted in the Western world may prove to be inappropriate to other societies. More, those societies may, by adopting them, actually mask other cultural realities relevant not only to themselves, but to us all.

## The concept of the child

64. This is equally true of the social and cultural perspectives that surround the concept of 'the child'. There are major controversies – though often unspoken and undefined – about just what is meant by the term 'child'. We speak of the 'competent child'; the 'problem-solving child'; the 'independent child'; the 'coming child'. There are a number of different theoretical models of child development, all of which stress certain specific aspects – be they the socio-psychological or the cognitive – but which often miss important other aspects of children, including the affective domain.

65. The strong emphasis in Western societies on cognitive development is linked to the 'marketable' features of human potential, but may in fact undermine traditional and domestic value systems which favour other human qualities; of cooperation, gentleness, kindness, generosity, communality, non-competitiveness and many others. These traditional value systems can be threatened by adopting child care models which implicitly carry in their wake certain basic assumptions about the nature of childhood itself.

66. Within the complex and varied situations faced by families, what is urgently required is innovation in the provision of day care, bearing in mind – and respecting – cultural differences. Certain approaches are more suitable in some settings than in others. The goal should be to offer several options to parents within a given setting, allowing each family to select the programme that is best suited to their particular needs.

## Three criteria for day care programmes

67. Within this context, many arrangements are possible, and even desirable, given that three major criteria are met:

- a) The programme should value the input of parents, and strive for their commitment at several levels. It should start with open communication between staff and parents, and lead to employment opportunities for parents, as well as their involvement in the organisational aspects and control of the programme. In this way, parents are empowered, and there is a shift away from the tendency to work 'for' the community towards one of working 'with' the community. The skills of the professionals

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are, in this way, harnessed to serve the community's needs, and the often disempowering nature of institutions is thereby avoided.

- b) Programmes should be appropriate to the cultural milieus in which they are set. They should be sensitive to the considerable cultural and traditional differences that exist within and between societies on the parenting roles of men and women. New ideas should only be introduced with respect to the threat these may pose to the stability and cohesion of some communities.
- c) Programmes should value an integrated approach to service provision. Within certain programmes, an array of nutrition, health and parent support, as well as training services may be offered. In other situations, a different kind of linking up is needed. Information about and contact with the relevant services may be established. Programmes which are broadly based and address the priorities which the community itself establishes, are probably better situated to provide support for families.

68. While there is a great deal to be said against the many formal types of care for the young child, there are many other instances where a centre-based approach has been adopted with extremely positive results for the community. Jamaica's Basic Schools programme, for instance, has maintained a system of essentially community-based and largely community-supported early childhood education even as government support for it has increased. In Trinidad, Servol brings teenagers from its adolescent development programme to work in its early childhood centres, thus exposing these young people to the responsibility, challenge and pleasure of working with the very young. Servol's medical, dental and nutrition programmes reflect an integrated approach to such services. The work of the Maori and Pacific Islander communities in New Zealand provides an excellent example of this process in which mothers and others – including grandparents and community elders – have set up early childhood education centres with the aim of enhancing the cultural/linguistic inheritance of the communities. The name of these centres, 'language nests' (*Te Kohanga Reo* in Maori) shows where the emphasis lies. In

Chile, mothers and fathers are employed as para-professionals in early childhood education centres, yielding several positive results: staff is provided for the centre, and parents' participation extends the effects of the programme beyond the period of early pre-school education since a bridge is established between the home and the centre.

### Home-based care

69. The home and the neighbourhood have always served as the natural setting for the young child's early environment. For a complex set of reasons, attention has in recent times tended to be focused on centre-based services, but home-based provision of family day care, or 'childminding' has continued to provide millions of children with day care during that same period. At its best, home-based care retains the essential one-to-one relationships between adults and children; the sensitive, home-based, small-scale, family-centred, personal form of caring that many parents prefer.

70. There are, of course, good reasons for questioning some aspects of home-based services. Mothers may become locked into a child care role that isolates them from the rest of the community. Given the poor quality of many family homes, these environments may actually be dangerous or unstimulating for the young child. And because children, like adults, are social beings, there is always the risk that home-based care will enclose the child in a social vacuum. The childminder who finds herself working in a high-rise, violence-prone block of flats within a metropolis illustrates the type of isolation to which this form of care is prone.

71. It should be noted too, that family-based provision of care is not an artificial re-creation of an extended family. Family day care providers should be treated respectfully, paid adequately, and offered appropriate training and support. Assembling the resources to tackle this problem should be seen as a *societal* and not as an *individual* challenge.

72. In many parts of the world, there is increasing recognition of the importance of providing support for home-based care which satisfies the objectives set out above. The Colombian Institute of Family Welfare recently launched a large-scale effort to reach 1.5 million children over a five-year period. In this programme, selected community

mothers will care for up to 15 children in their homes, providing meals for them as well. The providers will receive initial instruction on a variety of child development and health issues, as well as continuing supervision and support. In addition to funding from the government and the families concerned, the providers also have the right to receive a 'soft' loan from the Institute to improve the quality of their own homes. Of additional interest is the fact that, when a community has several of these 'neighbourhood homes', they can get together to create a community association which is recognised by the government. The association is then in a position to receive funding itself and to administer the system.

73. In the United Kingdom, the process has developed somewhat differently. There, a network of informal caregivers, or childminders, has come about through a registration process. This is a once-and-for-all certification, and is not linked to any form of training or more than nominal support from local social workers. The National Child-Minding Association (NCMA) in the UK is now developing its own support and training programmes and, in collaboration with the Open University, has produced a series of distance teaching materials which are being used by minders. The Association is now actively involved in linking up with other national childminding organisations, principally in Europe, and has formed an international body which will put the case for such individualised home-based day care.

#### Playgroups

74. In many countries other types of cooperation between families themselves either already exist or are being developed. One powerful example in Europe (principally the UK and the Netherlands) is the playgroup movement, which is based on parent-and-child group activities and is in many cases provided by mothers themselves. Whereas formal institutions accentuate the isolation of parents, playgroups can break down this loneliness and exclusion, and actively involve mothers. Indeed, many would claim that playgroups are even better for parents than they are for children.

75. Some have argued, however, that playgroups are an essentially middle class form of provision, in that they



demand resources and skills which are often not available to working class communities. In Coventry (UK) an experimental scheme to develop playgroups as 'annexes' to a large, publicly-funded nursery centre has proved very successful, and has made this type of provision accessible to many families who would otherwise not have been able to make use of it. The children are enrolled in the centre with access to its free health screening, free milk and low-cost materials. In addition, the children can make use of the playgroups, each run by two women from the local area who have been trained and are supported by a teacher operating as an outreach worker from the health centre. In Kenya, a different type of cooperative relationship exists within many communities. A division of labour operates whereby some families go to market to buy and transport commodities for the group, while others stay at home to care for the children – a form of communal sharing of resources, tasks and responsibilities (or of sharing the burden) that, in Kenya, is nationally known as 'the *Harambee* way'.

76. These cooperative forms of support are obviously rooted in the needs and experiences of families and are low-cost and accessible to a wide range of families. They should be encouraged wherever possible.

#### Teenage mothers

77. Several promising examples of programmes for teenage mothers and their young children are also being developed, notably in Dominica (the Adolescent Parent project), The Netherlands Antilles, and in Jamaica (The Maypen teenage mothers project). The Maypen programme combines an infant nursery, a toddler day care programme, and academic and vocational training for the young mothers, with a strong element of counselling and support. A positive outcome of this particular programme is that many of the young women have been re-united with their families after initially being stigmatised by them. Second, out of more than 100 teenage mothers involved in the project, there have been only two further pregnancies.

78. There are also programmes which, while they do not focus on teenage mothers as such, are addressing the issue of early pregnancy in working with teenagers whose lifestyles and circumstances suggest that they may be at

risk of becoming teenage mothers, as in The Netherlands (Groningen Young Families at Risk project).

**Hard-to-reach families**

79. Involving children and families living in hard-to-reach localities requires special strategies. Nomadic peoples, in countries such as Nigeria, or homeless families in certain large conurbations, are often extremely difficult to reach. One example of how technology has been set to work on this challenge is in Australia. There the new approach is based on computer/modem links between individual schools and a central station. Individual learning programmes concerned with literacy and numeracy are developed for each child and, by computer links, made available to every school in the network, so that as the travelling family moves from centre to centre, continuity of teaching and learning is maintained. The same technique is now being adapted with some success to serving the communities themselves.

80. New Zealand has developed an early childhood programme using home-based distance education. This provides a service for families and their pre-school children who are unable to attend recognised early childhood groups because they live in rural or inaccessible areas with no existing services, or are unable to make use of them because of illness or physical handicap. The programme is administered by trained kindergarten teachers, with a teacher/pupil ratio of 1 to 30. As far as possible, the programme incorporates the characteristics and learning experiences familiar to early childhood institutions throughout New Zealand – that is, a flexible programme with an emphasis on ‘discovery learning’ by the children in a varied environment where they can cope fairly independently. The adult’s role is primarily one of enriching this environment, and helping the children to interpret their experiences. The programme helps parents to draw on their own environment while supplementing their knowledge and understanding of working with young children, by suggesting a range of materials and ideas to use in ways appropriate to the child’s experiences and developmental level. While children are the focus of this programme, parents and teachers work together in partnership, and the active involvement of parents – usually mothers – is a vital component.

81. Lesotho and Zimbabwe are two countries where home visiting programmes, using a team approach, have been developed to focus on nutrition issues. A nurse, a village health worker and a parent from the community jointly conduct this type of outreach activity, in which parents in the programme obtain direct information in their own homes about food preparation.

**Materials** 82. The dissemination of materials, without an adequate explanation of their underlying value or theme, and without a description of the process which led to their production, can often be dangerous. These tend to become prescriptive and only really useful to the group which produced them in the first place. But they may also be dangerous because they contain a built-in rigidity. Materials which lack an open-ended approach, which do not give enough opportunity for innovation and improvisation often express a somewhat paternalistic view. They suggest that users are probably simple-minded, requiring concrete and limited information and precise directions. Materials which, on the other hand, are accompanied by first-hand descriptive experiences of the project, or by experienced staff who introduce them, can be very useful. Therefore care should be taken in circulating materials in isolation from the context in which they originated. Concentrating on the style, approach, attitudes and the process of production, on explaining what has been done and how to do it, can be extremely important. Good materials are those which pose questions rather than offer prescriptive solutions. Then they can become the catalysts for action.

**Physical space** 83. Many alternative approaches suffer from a lack of appropriate physical space for children. In overcrowded urban areas, the lack of interior or outside play space is a considerable barrier to child development. In Singapore, as in Boston, USA, pre-schools have been developed in renovated ground-floor accommodation within housing developments. In France, abandoned schools have been turned into community areas. Home-based programmes in urban areas also often face difficulties in finding accessible and safe outdoor play areas. While programmes in rural areas may appear to suffer less from such problems, several of Jamaica's Basic Schools, for instance, are struggling to

expand their exterior play areas. The lack of adequate play space for children is often a reflection of a wider lack of adequate living space for families in many communities.

#### Staff training and support

84. Training and support for staff involved in mounting alternative programmes are of critical importance. Professionals who function best within these programmes are often those who are secure in their own job identity and who do not feel threatened by a partnership with parents, but rather welcome it. More will be required of them as they accept new and more subtle roles and they need to be equipped for this. They will need to feel confident with the arrangements which enable them to make a valued contribution while they cooperate and share power with parents. Training, support and recognition are necessary for such professionals.

85. Para-professionals and local project workers are in even greater need of support and training. Their work is critical to the success of many projects. In Chile, one programme has provided training for its local community workers on child development issues, along with workshops aimed at encouraging and enhancing women's own self-esteem. Gradually, as the mothers go through an educational process and become familiar with the experience of working with children, they begin to discover their potential as educators and caregivers, understand the misconceptions they have of themselves and of others, and begin to see ways of changing. Thus they begin to develop self-confidence and to improve their self-image. This training process is not without its difficulties, as the women must 'grow' to see their role not only as a caregiver, but also as an educator. In New Zealand, training and support for home-based caregivers is typically provided through regular coffee-morning meetings while the children participate in playgroups. Sometimes the training is provided during visits to homes. Some short courses may be run in the evenings, but this can be an added pressure for a caregiver who, typically, has family responsibilities of her own in addition to those of the children placed with her. Some caregivers accompany family day care children to play centres or kindergartens, and this can provide an added opportunity to extend their own knowledge and experience and to contact others working with young children.

## Funding strategies

86. As alternative programmes are initiated, strong consideration needs to be given to developing solid funding strategies. Training, adequate pay for staff, and evaluation are all needed for programmes to thrive. While recognising that much work remains to be done in these areas, some promising examples stand out. The large-scale Colombian programme of *Hogares Infantiles* run by the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare now receives, by law, two per cent of all payrolls of public and private entities.

87. The Jamaican Basic Schools have been extremely resourceful in combining resources from the government, parents, local businesses, voluntary organisations and individuals to supplement local fundraising efforts. This has allowed other resources to be targeted more strategically towards, for example, the upgrading of training.

88. Within the context of changing social, economic and family patterns, the challenge to communities and professionals alike is to devise and refine better alternatives for the healthy development of the young child. These programmes must be seen as part of the network of care and support that all families need to thrive. If properly developed, these alternative models will be aligned to cultural and social norms and also present opportunities for strong parent and community involvement. Without solid innovation in this whole area, many communities will be without options or, at best, will be forced to resort to ineffective models based on outdated or inappropriate designs. With the development of an alternative programme, far better options can be provided for families as they struggle to gain their place in society.

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### III. MOVING TO SCALE: FROM LOCAL PRACTICE TO GENERAL POLICY

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89. One of the ambitions that characterises nearly all innovative programmes is the aim of 'moving to scale'; of seeking not only to develop an initial local venture, but to replicate the experience elsewhere as well as to proselytise the 'message' of a new approach, a fresh discovery. Moreover, there is the further aim of winning broader support for the new approach from regional and national governments. If there are lessons to be learned from the local experience, then surely the benefits that have accrued should be shared not just by local communities, but by the society as a whole. Moreover, the wider concern to advocate the care and education of young children in societies where such provision is generally lacking or of poor quality, springs directly from the field experience of establishing a specific project within an impoverished community.

90. 'Going to scale' can, in fact, be seen in several different contexts. Where a project is institutionalised in the public service, it is important to ensure that facilities are expanded, that parents are involved, that the expanded service offers reasonable employment prospects and working conditions, and that enough resources are being made available to make the 'model' effective. There is, secondly, a 'dissemination' factor, where projects want to broadcast their experiences and views, and influence policies. And there remains the more local task of retaining the vitality of existing projects and ensuring that they do not sink back into an unchanging routine.

Making resources  
available

91. Such aims bring in their train several immediate difficulties. While it may be feasible to fund individual local initiatives within a particular cultural, social and economic milieu, and while governments, in particular,

may be perfectly satisfied, and even eager, to countenance such experiments, it is an altogether different matter to seek a commitment to replicating such experiences on a national scale. Governments, in their search for 'solutions' to social questions, will often go 'model shopping' or reach for accessible formulas which are then imposed upon the communities. In the United States, there is currently a debate as to whether existing experimental models of family support should be adopted and replicated, or whether some other models should be adapted to meet the needs of individual communities.

92. There is no evidence that any one strategy is completely effective. Replication, in any case, is hardly ever able to be consistent. The example of the Follow-Through programmes in the USA is instructive here. Although the brief was to copy a particular strategy, the results of the evaluation suggested there was as much variation within the replications as there was between the different models available. It is rare for complex programmes to be reproduced precisely, in any case. The real danger for projects, however, is that in seeking to 'go to scale', governments or national agencies often face experiments with the 'demonstration-dilution dilemma'. That is, they are anxious to adopt and adapt what appears to be a practical approach, but without making the necessary resources available. The outcome is that the effectiveness of programmes can often be sacrificed on the altar of economics. The image of the programme is expanded on a wider scale, but the substance has been lost.

93. In other countries, there is often a latent hostility to the idea of empowering local communities and a reluctance to accept the resource implications of providing early childhood care and education. Some programmes are diametrically opposed to current government philosophies, and have indeed been established to address issues which some governments wish to ignore. In such cases, 'going to scale' is obviously not possible, and other partners have to be sought to replicate the initial experience - universities, non-governmental agencies, the churches or voluntary bodies.

94. It is impossible to generalise about the differing national structures which affect the choice of appropriate

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strategies for 'going to scale'. The key phrase for all projects must be: 'Know Your System'; this implies identifying the key components within it, being clear about which aspects of the project can be promulgated reasonably and with benefit to a wider audience, and not waiting until the project's initial funding is almost exhausted before starting the process of seeking further support or extending its network.

### Networking

95. Networking – the process of developing wider relationships with influential groups, individuals, voluntary organisations and other agencies – is an essential factor in promoting the advocacy role. It is often a prerequisite of 'going to scale'. Within this process, one of the key tasks is the identification of real community leaders who command respect. In addition, political awareness on the part of projects is essential, and a realisation that the political agendas prevalent at any one time may either be transient or stimulated by pressures which are not in the control of the politicians themselves.

96. The belief that it only requires a statement of the obvious needs of families and communities to convince politicians of the worthiness of new programmes is itself naive. Often, it is not the rational arguments that sway political priorities, but the balance of power within the society as a whole. Are there significant groups within the community who strongly support the innovation and are they in a position to promote change? Are there important and influential groups who would be opposed to it and can they politically be ignored? Would support for change fall within the power elite's manifesto and would it therefore enhance the status of the ruling group? Is it economically feasible? Does 'going to scale' involve an administrative structure which either does not already exist, or which would require considerable upheaval to create? Put another way, is the 'absorptive capacity' of a project needs to be judged to see how well it will harmonise with social expectations as well as with national policies and resources.

### The Jamaican experience

97. The Jamaican experience of a locally-based, community-inspired and maintained Basic School programme of early childhood education and care, which now enjoys national support and is being extended, is a heartening



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example of a successful transition; but one with a particular history. Basic Schools began in Jamaica in the 1940s, growing out of the needs of communities to provide custodial care for children below school age. For these young children, there were no facilities, no buildings, no teachers, no books or materials, no curriculum, no resources. They started up wherever a local parent could be found who was prepared to look after a group of children and where a place could be found for them to meet. This might have been in abandoned buildings without roofs or even walls, on verandahs, in sheds or the market-place, or even under a tree in the open countryside. In one sense, the Basic School movement was already a 'national' project when it first won official recognition. What has happened since is that this populist movement has gained entry to the resources and status of the formal education system, whereas before it was seen as being, in some ways, in opposition to that system.

98. These local basic 'schools' involved many children who were socially and economically disadvantaged. The more affluent families used private nurseries or were able to pay for alternative provision for their young children. So local children who were economically excluded from the more privileged forms of early childhood care might be accommodated in a small building, with as many as 80 of them in one classroom, with very few seats or work places, no facilities, and a 'teacher' who had experienced only the most limited education herself; who, moreover, could only be paid a pittance out of the very limited funds which local community could scrape together.

99. Faced with a national education system which had a developed formal teacher-training component, the idea that ordinary local people could themselves 'teach' met with considerable, and understandable, resistance. The reality had to be demonstrated by developing strategies for training the local teachers, providing them with a sound curriculum, and involving local parents in the activities, thereby lifting the quality of the schools themselves and improving the public image of these local grassroots ventures. This was the basis of the Bernard van Leer Foundation's input into the PECE programme which, by being sustained over a long

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period, enabled the movement to grow and, by networking, to influence local and national opinion.

100. A ripple effect developed. Government policies coincided with Basic School aspirations to a point where the Ministry of Education was able to play a key role in subsequent developments, and outside funding was able to be targeted on specific needs within the developing programme. A national enquiry in 1984 which looked into the future needs of the Basic Schools movement and its development, highlighted the need to improve teacher training, to provide more cohesion and support for the schools, and to improve both teacher competence and attitudes. In itself, the report provided a springboard for further action. The government was able to introduce both a new horizon for the programme, through a five-year Programme for the Advancement of Childhood Education (PACE), as well as direct funding with substantial subsidies, whilst acknowledging that the local initiatives would have to continue to seek their own resources from the communities they served. Basic Schools have therefore developed a healthy dynamic relationship with a tripartite body of supporters: national government, the non-governmental sector and the local community.

101. Parents were also making their own evaluations, both of their satisfaction with the programme and of the subsequent progress of their children within the State education system. Basic School children performed well in the annual National Festival of Arts competitions. Societal yardsticks were being met and national awareness of the importance of early childhood education was growing. Equally, there was a tangible integration of the Basic Schools' training programme into the national system of education; a process of institutionalisation was at work, which would ensure the sustainability of the entire venture. Perhaps above all, the Basic Schools movement allowed the nation to undertake a community experiment for which the timing was right, and which offered a unique opportunity that mirrored both local and national priorities. These were the outcomes of evaluation at both local and national level.

Key elements 102. In this 'success' story there are a number of key elements which are important to any process of 'moving to

scale'. There is the need for enlightened leadership, which can not only perceive the relevance of a local project in national terms, but which commands the skills of strategic planning and communication to articulate, locally and nationally, the 'message' which the project is proclaiming. There is the 'absorptive capacity' of the initiative, which in the case of Basic Schools – because of their 'rough and ready' nature – made intervention at this level easier to market, while at the same time dramatically illustrating a national need to provide early childhood education.

**A number of stages** 103. Such examples of going to national scale – or of winning national approval and support – are, however, the exception rather than the rule. In most instances, the process of 'going to scale' involves a number of different stages. Among these are:

- a) ensuring the survival of the original project;
- b) spreading the 'message' through networking;
- c) seeking a replication of the original project and thereby extending its influence;
- d) influencing national policy, either by 'institutionalising' the original project or directing public awareness to its issues.

104. Success in any of these areas is sometimes related to timing. In the USA, for example, the movement towards community-based family support presently happens to accord both with the aims of conservatives, who wish to promote well-functioning and independent, self-supporting families, and with the aims of liberals, who emphasise that such programmes are critical for families to function effectively. This confluence of political agendas may be an essential factor in the subsequent take-up of programmes which, in another context, may meet no matching political agenda and may therefore be ignored.

105. It is often the case that it is easier to influence and modify an existing national programme rather than seek to bring about radical change. The Jamaican experience is

pertinent here, in that it showed that the innovation could be handled from within the system, by focusing on the teacher training aspect. Here change was brought about not as a result of overwhelming external evaluation, but rather because of demonstrable local benefit and popular demand.

#### The role of evaluation

106. Evaluation, nevertheless, is an important and potent factor in convincing influential outsiders of the value of a project. Evidence of programme effectiveness, especially reports of favourable long-term results containing some indication of cost-effectiveness, can provide a powerful message to policy makers, especially if they are politically motivated towards moving in a direction that is being indicated by a project. If, on the other hand, the evidence suggests a radical change in directions which are politically unfashionable or inexpedient, then, unless the evidence is overpowering, it is unlikely to have any impact. As was pointed out: 'One sewage pipe does more to get you elected than any amount of education.'

107. The fact is that evaluation studies of family-oriented programmes seldom produce such clear-cut and unequivocal findings. Much of the currently available data springs from single-site programmes from whose experience it is often difficult to generalise. Few studies have provided systematic information about both the purely local factors that make projects successful as well as the more universal processes with which they are involved. Moreover, most evaluations have focused their attention purely on child outcomes and, even more specifically, on children's cognitive development. Very few have attempted to measure the impact of these programmes on the community at large. Third, few have been concerned about programme processes, about what projects actually do, nor have they employed the relevant evaluation strategies to indicate such processes.

#### Distinct steps

108. These weaknesses in current evaluation programmes should not deter but rather encourage projects to undertake well-designed studies. This will involve a series of distinct steps:

- a) setting out the aims and objectives of the project in clear and unambiguous terms. This will normally have

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been completed as part of the project proposal, and will typically be rather general;

- b) translating the broad aims into clear objectives which can be understood by all team members, and eventually by those within the community being served. It is important that everyone involved with a project should know what it is attempting to achieve, as well as knowing what it is *not* trying to do. Objectives should be reviewed and reformulated from time to time with staff in the light of experience and the analysis of outcomes;
- c) developing a set of indicators for each objective. These need not be highly sophisticated, or necessarily involve statistics;
- d) careful observation and, where necessary, measurement of factors relevant to each identified indicator. This may well include anecdotal data about individual children and families, detailed case studies, as well as data about community activities. It needs to be stressed that mothers and fathers with even the most limited experience and education can quickly become accurate and trustworthy recorders of their children's development. Once people understand that there is a real purpose to such activities, experience has shown that they can be exceptionally meticulous in recording information about their own children;
- e) frequent feedback to project staff and families, as well as communities, about findings from the continuous monitoring and recording. People must be convinced that the work of recording and observing has a perceptible purpose and that, far from being conducted for its own sake, it can have an immediate, direct effect on the conduct and direction of the project;
- f) the corollary to this is that when the evidence indicates a weakness or a gap in the project, the team can make immediate changes, even if this means upsetting the previously established evaluation programme;

- g) a final evaluation of the outcomes of the project, in terms of its own objectives, rather than of some theoretical model which an evaluator, particularly an external evaluator, may impose upon the project. Such a final evaluation should ideally include some analysis of outcomes in relation to costs, with comparative data on other forms of provision;
- h) the sophistication of the analysis of such studies should depend on the human and other resources available to projects, as well as on the target audience. There is no excuse for preparing highly technical and largely incomprehensible reports for people who simply want to know how their children have benefited from the project in ways other than those they can see for themselves. Other reports, however, which may be directed to government or to a wider general public should be written at a level which will combine optimal comprehension with enough persuasive material to make an impact on these audiences.

**Advocacy 109.** Sound evaluative data, which should be qualitative as well as quantitative, can be of major assistance in allowing projects to 'move to scale'. There may equally be a need for more direct advocacy, for promoting the cause of communities, families and children in deprived circumstances; for speaking out about human rights and needs, quite apart from whether projects 'work' or whether 'evidence' exists. Often, in any case, the evidence is partial, or can be interpreted in different ways, or is too locally-based. A good evaluation study can provide the basis for a series of publications, written at different levels for specific audiences, as part of a wider dissemination programme.

110. In this advocacy role, projects can have a considerable impact on policy even if the projects themselves do not 'go to scale'. They can act as radical voices for the dispossessed within their own societies and stimulate other initiatives. They are also often in a unique position to draw national attention to other agendas, such as the new United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child whose final draft will appear in 1989, and which will set universally-agreed standards for the protection of children and provide a

framework for developing programmes to improve the situation for children everywhere.

111. Advocacy of this kind is particularly necessary for projects which work in 'crisis' situations, such as with refugee children in Thailand or in Pakistan, or in war zones where the need is to meet an immediate, pressing social and human problem, and where the techniques of the project are inevitably tailor-made to deal with a specific local need. Other initiatives are related to a particular minority group within a larger community, where the problems are of a nature that the solutions to them, although often highly innovative, are not appropriate for extension to a national scale.

112. 'Going to scale' often involves an infrastructure of support and training which is of a different order to that used within single projects. Where the focus is on the need to upgrade teachers, for example, there needs to be provision for both in-service as well as initial training. This, in turn, requires a programme for 'training the trainers' as well as resources for maintaining the impetus of change. In Jamaica and in Kenya, for example, 'going to scale' has involved a shift in the programme from site-specific training of teachers and para-professionals to the preparation of specialised personnel to work on the training and retraining of teachers and para-professionals. Special training programmes may also be necessary if – as was the case in Peru – expansion involves meeting new needs in different regions of the country with their own characteristics and demands. The assumption that because a programme works in one part or region of a country, it can be exported wholesale to another region is seldom the case. Local conditions, dialects, perhaps totally different languages and cultures may be involved, requiring extensive modifications to an original blueprint.

#### Cooperation

113. Because experience indicates the need for more comprehensive strategies for high-risk families, a number of programmes and projects are developing joint initiatives with other community agencies to create broader partnerships in order to maximise resources. In the USA, for example, education and health authorities in some cities are coming together with family support groups to provide 'two-

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generational' programmes: that is, support for both children and adults, to facilitate both parents' and children's human development.

114. The realisation that single projects cannot do everything, that they need to enlist cooperation and mutual support from other agencies and services while retaining their own innovative approach, is one way in which the impact of the projects themselves can be increased, costs can be shared and, most important, effectiveness can be enhanced.



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#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

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115. The challenge of working with and for children and their communities in the latter part of the twentieth century is being undertaken with a new focus on modifying and influencing the entire environment of the family, rather than targeting any single, specific – and largely child-oriented – need. Gone are the days when enhancing a child's IQ through a curriculum of intense instruction might seem to offer his or her best chances of survival and development. Instead, the twin streams of early childhood education and care have been brought together with the best practices of community development to offer a potentially stimulating programme that addresses not only the immediate needs of the child, but also seeks to influence the quality of his or her environment.

116. Such broad-based community programmes recognise that children both influence, and are the product of, a complex tapestry of interactions – notably and primarily those with their parents in the earliest years – which together either stimulate development or retard it. While in certain special cases a single overwhelming need such as starvation, disease, disaster or human conflict may dictate the agenda, experience suggests that in general, single-focus programmes which seek to 'intervene' in a developmental process *which is itself otherwise unchanged*, are unlikely to produce long-term benefits.

117. What is clear is that early childhood education and care is a potent 'entry point' in this community-based approach. For many so-called disadvantaged groups, their children are indeed their last, best hope. This bond between parent and child, between the present and the future, may well be the one way they have of seeking to shape the

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seemingly impenetrable social, physical and economic environment in which they are enveloped. Through their involvement with their children, they can gain new strength and new skills which may transfer to other areas of their lives. This is the crux of 'progressing through partnership'. As Paulo Freire wrote: 'The important thing is to help men and nations help themselves; to place them in consciously critical confrontation with their problems, and to make them be agents of their own recuperation.'

#### A more hopeful future

118. 'Progressing through partnership' is no mere rhetoric. It is, on the contrary, the most viable way these communities have to a more hopeful future. At the end of the day, as Fr Gerry Pantin has said, the key is to foster the emergence of '...independent men and women in their own right [who can] make their own decisions and have access to the structures of power, influence and finance which are the essential factors in getting anything accomplished in this modern world.' The aim is to cut the noose of dependency, to ensure that people can function in their own right, and can operate the levers of power to meet their own needs.

119. This is slow, patient work. It offers no spectacular results, but its impact can be lasting, perhaps for generations to come. 'Building people to put talent to work' is how the late Dudley Grant described the work of the Bernard van Leer Foundation. That is an appropriate tribute to his own lifetime of service. But it is, as well, a compelling agenda for the future.

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own homes and in the community in order to create understanding and awareness of children's developmental needs. This can include the importance of play, making toys and equipment from scrap materials and from the natural environment, information and advice on nutrition and health, and other needs of the children or the community. Many of the people doing this work are women from the same community who have been trained by the project. The involvement of parents and other adults helps to build up their own skills and self-confidence and this, in turn, leads to other improvements in the social and physical structure and the self-assurance of the community as a whole.

**Geographical span** In accordance with its statutes, the Foundation gives preference to countries in which the Van Leer Group of Companies is established.

**Applications for support** Decisions concerning the funding of major projects are taken by the Board of Trustees of the Foundation. No commitments can be given before such approval by the Board.

There are no application forms and the Foundation does not prescribe a rigid formula for proposals. Potential applicants are strongly advised to submit an outline of their aims and objectives before preparing a detailed proposal.

Funds can be made available for the implementation of innovative projects in the field of early childhood care and education. Applicants can be public bodies, academic or non-government institutions, or voluntary organisations.

Grants are not given to individuals or for general support to organisations or in response to general appeals. The Foundation does not provide study, research or travel grants.

The Foundation recognises that projects in its field of work require time to develop and implement new approaches and grants are normally made for more than one year. The long-term sustainability of a project is an important consideration in the appraisal of proposals.

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