

SECTION IX

Looking Ahead



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1. Clearly, India stands today at a crucial cross-road in its path towards greater social progress and actualization of children's rights, both of which are inextricably linked to each other, and to which the Government is deeply committed. Though we have come a long way since Independence on several social and economic fronts, we have yet a long way to go to fulfil all the pledges that we have made to our children.
2. Our legislation, policies and programmes are in place and continue to evolve and respond to contemporary requirements in a fast changing world. We have in the last decade witnessed tremendous progress in the areas of literacy, especially female literacy, and women's empowerment. We are confident that it is a matter of time that our proactive policies with regard to education, viz: universal elementary education and the special focus on female literacy, and Women's Empowerment will gather further momentum and translate themselves into improved indicators relating to child survival, child care, health and nutrition, and literacy, especially of the girl child, who holds the key for the future.
3. An analysis of the last decade has underscored the critical importance of the health, literacy and economic skill development of the adolescent girl. This has been clearly acknowledged by the policy makers and planners and will form the focal point of human resource development during this decade. Again, it is a matter of time that the health, literacy and economic empowerment of the adolescent girl will translate itself into later marriage, safer motherhood and improved maternal health, smaller families, improved child care and survival, higher literacy rates and lesser gender discrimination.
4. We will in the next year universalise the Integrated Child Development Services Programme to cover the entire country, and during this decade our aim will be to upscale the quality of services under the programme. The present decade will also see a sustained focus on the eradication of malnutrition and micro-nutrient deficiencies, that are insidiously preventing our children from realizing their complete potential. The National Nutrition Mission has been announced by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India on August 15, 2001, and is in the process of being operationalised. We expect that with a focus on the eradication of malnutrition through the inter-generational, life cycle approach we will be able to make an appreciable dent in the problem of malnutrition in a long-term and sustained manner.
5. Our efforts towards child protection, prevention of trafficking of children, and elimination of child labour will receive further impetus through the amendment of the Immoral Traffick Prevention Act, and the establishment of the National Commission for Children that will not

only act as an Ombudsman for children, but will also monitor child rights throughout the country. Most importantly, it is the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan that will be the key catalyst for a long term and sustainable solution for eliminating child labour.

6. Our focus during this decade will also be reaching the children not reached thus far, and devising special mechanisms to implement programmes successfully in the pockets of backwardness and chronically backward areas in the country.

7. The preparation of this Country Report has been an extremely educating and rewarding experience, as it has made us see first hand the connectivity and complexity of socio-economic indicators in relation to the fulfilment of children's rights. We are happy that the facts and analyses presented in this Country Report are the very latest, taken from the Census 2001, National Family Health Survey 1999 and the Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey 2000. We are confident that through our renewed commitment, acceleration of our on-going programmes and through new initiatives to address the gap areas, we will be able to achieve much greater progress for securing children's rights during this decade.

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