LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

UNESCO SOURCES No. 88 / MARCH 1997

THE CARROT AND THE STICK
Bert Warburton
Lithgow N.S.W. (Australia)

I was pleased to read your November dossier entitled “Down to the last drop” (UNESCO Sources, No. 84). The issue focusing on our wasteful use of such a precious resource, water, is long overdue. My congratulations in presenting the stakes involved without falling into the trap of hysteria which may make for exciting headlines but generally doesn’t lead to any meaningful discussion or action. There is, however, one major point which you did not raise: changing people’s habits and attitudes is never an easy task, and usually requires some prompting, especially in rich countries where a clean and plentiful water supply is taken for granted - where dishwashers are used half empty, or taps are left dripping and bathtubs turned into swimming pools.

The hip-pocket nerve is usually very responsive to such prompting. In other words, the price of water should reflect its real value, financial incentives offered to those who use it most efficiently. At the same time, governments would do well to invest in a major publicity campaign showing people very practically how to use less water in their homes. There are any number of very simple things that can be done to cut water consumption in the home - from changing tap washers regularly to using special shower heads that deliver a fine (and satisfying) spray rather than a torrent.

Such campaigns, using the carrot and the stick approach, can work very well. Witness the drunk-driving campaigns in NSW, Australia, where a combination of random breath testing, heavy fines and widespread publicity - highlighting not only the penalties but also ways that people could still go out and enjoy a drink - dramatically cut the number of road deaths and radically changed behaviour. People still go out and enjoy themselves, but they’ll leave the car at home and use a taxi, or a bus provided by the club or the pub for the purpose, or a friend will be designated to stay sober.

It could be argued that such an approach borders on the repressive, or infringes upon civil liberties. But aren’t civic responsibilities and community well-being, which imply careful use of community resources (of which water is surely one of the most vital), equally important?

DOING MORE THAN MAKING DO
Julio C. Valiente
Social worker
Concepción (Paraguay)

Permit me to tell you just how much I appreciate the work done by Sources. I am certain that all your readers share my opinion when it comes to the importance of the publication.

At the age of 38, I have already spent 16 years working with organizations in the countryside to promote community development. My region is predominantly agricultural, in what is undoubtedly the poorest area in the country. And yet, we have had our fair share of interesting experiences not just “making do”, but most importantly, in improving people’s living conditions.

THANKS!
Diego D. Orellana
Cuenca (Ecuador)

I would like to congratulate your magazine. It is one of your international organization’s best means of informing the public of its achievements.

THE WHOLE GANG
Ibrahima Magassouba
Secretary-General
UNESCO’s National Commission in Guinea
Conakry

Your publication enables us to better inform all of our readers - school children, students, teachers, researchers, cultural figures, media, non-governmental organizations, etc.

STILL READING
Carlos Izquierdo
National Centre for the Improvement of Science Teaching
Caracas (Venezuela)

I continue to read your magazine with great interest. It has proven to be a very useful tool in my work, in the field of education and in the popularization of science by radio and other media. For the past 21 years, I have produced a daily broadcast entitled, “Life and Science”, and for the last 11 a weekly programme, “Childhood and the Future”.

Many thanks to the whole team at Sources who knows just how to keep the magazine alive in the long-term.

UNESCO Sources is available on Internet under the headings: new or publications at our address: http://www.unesco.org
THE RIGHT TO PEACE

We must identify the roots of global problems and strive, with imagination and determination, to check conflicts in their early stages. Better still prevent them. Prevention is the victory that gives the measure of our distinctively human faculties. We must know in order to foresee. Foresee in order to prevent. We must act in a timely, decisive and courageous manner...

"... A system collapsed in 1989 because, concentrating on equality, it forgot liberty. The present system, focused on liberty, will know the same fate if it forgets equality - and solidarity.... We must then, for the sake of both principle and self-interest, redouble in every field the fight against exclusion and marginalization... Peace, development and democracy form an interactive triangle. They are mutually reinforcing. Without democracy, there is no sustainable development; disparities become unsustainable and lead to imposition and domination...

"... Education is the key to the urgently needed change in the direction pursued by today's world, which is increasing disparities in the possession of material goods and knowledge instead of reducing them.

"... This profound transformation from oppression and confinement to openness and generosity, this change based on the daily use of all of us of the verb 'to share' - which is the key to a new future - cannot be achieved without our young people...

"... The universal renunciation of violence requires the commitment of the whole of society. These are not matters of government but matters of State, not only matters for the authorities but for society in its entirety... In order to change the world needs everyone... It is time for action...

We must react, each of us, to the best of our abilities. It is not just a matter of looking at what the government is doing. We must part with something of 'our own'. We must give, give of ourselves."

Extracts from the declaration of Director-General Federico Mayor entitled “The Human Right to Peace” (January 1997).
RENEWABLE ENERGY OF THE SUN

Our lives revolve around the sun in ways we tend to ignore; from our hominid ancestors opting for stone caves which, absorbing the sun’s rays, offered relatively warm places to spend the nights to cosmonauts of the Mir Space Station depending on the ship’s solar cells.

With full-size colour photos, this commemorative brochure marks the launching of the World Solar Programme (1996-2005), serving as both a synopsis and the launching of the World Solar Station depending on the ship’s solar cells.

Complex instrumentals take the lead, with nyakatangale, a mouth-resonating musical bow, ulimba, a gourd-resonating xylophone, nkhwendo, tubular idiophones and mitangu, the struck hoe blade ensemble. And with the influences of peoples like the Lomwe, Chewa and Ngoni, Malawians are also masters in intricate drum ensembles, with rhythmic excitement building in dance ceremonies beating from sunset to dawn.

PERIODICALS

PROSPECTS

Appeals for education reform are leading a bandwagon around the world, attracting governments, international organisations and NGOs alike. However, they risk putting the cart before the horse, ignoring the major actors - teachers. The latest issue of Prospects (No. 99) looks to the future of the school with an opening article by Jacques Attali, before examining the quandary in which “modern educational policies and reforms demand an ideal teacher that does not exist in reality and whose availability, in the numbers required, will take decades to develop”, according to the contributor Rosa Maria Torres. The issue moves on to explore the facets involved, by looking at who and where are the world’s 60 million teachers, essentially ignored in the reform process. Instead of planning the reform first and training teachers afterwards, authors point, for example, to the need to not just include them but encourage their “professionalization”, enabling them “to devote less energy to sleight of hand and apparent conformity, and more to achieving objectives and engaging in dialogue with those to whom they are answerable”.

While exploring general trends in both industrialized and developing countries, the review provides case-studies from Spain to sub-Saharan Africa.

THE UNESCO COURIER

What is the link between Tangiers, New York, Bombay, La Paz, Marseilles and Vancouver? All of these cities have a history “punctuated by the arrival of successive waves of immigrants”, remind the editorialists of the March issue which highlights “plural Cities”. Whether they be famous for their ports and financial centres or notorious for their slums, these cities have all “acquired the knack of handling spasms of violence and even of drawing vitality from them”, often becoming the “pacemakers” of their countries, instilling a “creative energy” which “seeps through hidden channels into outlying areas, bearing much-needed antidotes to uniformity and conformity”. 

BOOKS

RENEWABLE ENERGY OF THE SUN

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W ith full-size colour photos, this commemorative brochure marks the launching of the World Solar Programme (1996-2005), serving as both a synopsis and a complement to Madanjeet Singh’s earlier book, The Sun: Eternal Flame of Creation, also published by UNESCO. Looking to history and culture, the author recounts how and why different renewable energy sources have developed before exploring their potential. Steering clear of dry technical language, the book fires the imagination. After imagining the Romans and Japanese in their geothermally-heated pools 2000 years ago, readers speed through history to find Iceland tapping into this source to provide for 85% of all its residential heating needs.

Simmering in the country’s cultural diversity, the recordings offer a rich blend of influences spiced with an original flavour. The result is a highly-varied yet distinctly “Malawian” music - from the formation dances derived from decades of watching colonial marching bands to the proverbial storytelling accompanied by bangwe, a seven-stringed board lather...

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BATTING THE IRRATIONAL WITH JIRI GRYGAR

Working at Czechoslovakia’s astronomy institute should have been a dream come true for Jiří Grygar who recorded his first meteor shower at the age of 13. But politics blocked his view in 1980, with his superiors “locking him in the institute”, cutting him off from outside contact and his students after he repeatedly refused to join the Communist party. Thanking his lucky stars, the astronomer found refuge in a most unusual place: a low-temperature physics laboratory where he dreamed of using infrared remote sensing to map the heavens. Shifting to a high-temp lab, he moved closer to the skies by imagining the origins of the universe.

But Grygar found that the ‘big bang’ in his professional life came not just in doing science, but populating science at a certain age. As much as 60% of the adult population (over the age of 18) drinks and smokes. Kids usually start around the age of 14.” She says, before pointing to the unprecedented advertising campaigns launched by the tobacco and alcohol industries. “With consumption dropping in industrialized countries, they’re now targeting the developing world.”

Setting out to launch a counter-attack with preventative action in the island’s schools, ADIC ran up against some unexpected resistance: smoking teachers all too appreciative of lighting up a cigarette with the evening’s aperitif. But the students presented another surprise: unbridled enthusiasm.

“Instead of lecturing on the health risks, we focused on deglamourising drugs, getting kids between the ages of 12 and 16 to see through the publicity myths and images insisting that they need to smoke or drink for real enjoyment.”

Seeing their fathers spend, for example, 30% of the family income on cigarettes and alcohol, Salgado says the kids formed “action groups”, countering the advertising by plastering their own posters and stickers in schools, shops, buses and even at home. In Matara and Hambanto, for example, they met with members of parliament to restrict the number of new liquor shops opened, while two schools in Wattegama in the Kandy district successfully removed all tobacco advertisements in local shops.

But perhaps their biggest battle has been fought at Colombo’s beloved cricket field, where the dreaded billboards cast their shadow over school matches. Seeing red, they launched another campaign, but this time had to settle on a compromise: sheets to cover the billboards during school-related events. And the next game-plan? “Oooh!” says Salgado. “Better ask the kids.”

MALA SALGADO: STRIPPING AWAY THE GLAMOUR

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Amy OTCHET

UNESCO SOURCES No. 88 / MARCH 1997
LEARNING TO WORK WITH THEIR HANDS CAN HELP PUT KIDS WHO HAVE HAD DIFFICULTIES LEARNING BACK ON THE EDUCATION TRACK (Photo G. Cerallin, Ecoles Sans Frontières).
Street children have no place in the world of adults. Beaten, kicked out of their homes, unjustly imprisoned (p.9), they are even killed off like vermin in certain cities like Sao Paulo (p.12-13). And schools, which are either incapable or simply not interested in responding to their specific needs, represent just another defeat for these kids (see below).

Today, the non-governmental organizations are the only ones having any success in providing these children with the kind of comprehensive care they need to relearn to be part of society. In Mexico, the Juconi Foundation is working to reintroduce them into the formal education system (p.10), while in Senegal, an unusual Koranic school is using whatever means available to offer them a trade (p.11).

But all projects of this kind are doomed to fail without the support of qualified and competent educators, sorely lacking in cities like Bucharest (p.14), or unless help is given to the children’s families, who can be difficult to reach, as in Ho Chi Minh City (p.15). Then there are the police, who run into these kids on a daily basis and, provided they receive the special training required and are subjected to necessary controls, can provide real help rather than harm (p.16).

It’s not only because they’re homeless that they end up in the streets,” explains Father Patrick Giros, founder of the French association “Aux captifs la liberation” (Liberation for Captives). “It’s because they’ve been rejected in a thousand and one ways.” Street children have accumulated a series of failures. The first almost always involves the family. Neglected, beaten, raped, these children substitute street violence for that of their parents. Forced to earn money, they end up leaving “service station families” where they no longer belong, and failure in school inevitably follows.

ALWAYS MORE NUMEROUS

They are thus millions living at the frontiers of a society which has become inaccessible. How many exactly? Always more numerous, insist social workers.

The figures, however, don’t mean very much. All depends on how you define “street child”, a term which covers different realities: those who work in the street and go home periodically (the most numerous), those who live in the streets 24 hours a day, and runaways. According to UNICEF, they total over 100 million and almost half of them are in Latin America.

“But when I’m asked where the problem is most severe, I am tempted to say that it’s not in places where they are the most numerous, but rather where no-one’s talking about them,” warns Stephane Tessier, the programme coordinator at the International Centre for Childhood and the Family. “Today, all of the world’s biggest cities - in the developing countries, those in transition and those in the industrialized nations - function by excluding children.”

In the latter, they are less visible because they are rapidly placed in homes or specialized institutions. But the mesh of these “safety nets” stretches under the weight of market ideology. You can even watch the same soaps and sitcoms on the tv screens identical from one end of the planet to another.

As specific as it is, this culture is no less standardized and global: identical from one end of the planet to another. “In cities of over one million inhabitants, the organization of public space is the same everywhere, with traditional cultural landmarks strictly limited to family and school ties,” says Tessier. “We find the same consumer and market ideology. You can even watch the same soaps and sitcoms on the tv screens in shop display windows.”

And there are many other points in common. Street children live in gangs and...
need money to survive. They sell what they have: their working power, their docility, their penal immunity and their bodies. “Studies reveal that they earn the equivalent of about two minimum wages each month. But they have no possibility of saving any money because they spend it all rapidly or it’s stolen from them.” The “careers” of street children, from Bogota to Kinshasa, from Manila to Los Angeles, are thus very similar. When they are small, they’re used by the bigger children for the jobs out front: as lookouts, messengers, to carry drugs, etc. After that they must become gang leaders to keep clear of the police, the mafia, rival gangs and the likes.

Many are ravaged by drugs by the age of 15 and it is estimated that 80% to 90% of children who live in the streets have taken drugs at one time or another. They sniff glue, solvents of all kinds, or carbon monoxide, using a plastic bag attached to automobile exhaust pipes. Those with the most money, who work regularly, buy themselves a bit of crack. “They’ll tell you that they take drugs to forget their miseries and that, in any case, they’re going to die soon.”

VULNERABLE

It is this same incapacity to project themselves into the future, this “strongly identifying” valorization of the notion of danger, of risk taking, which, together with the demands of “clients”, cause them to refuse condoms and makes them particularly vulnerable to AIDS. Nervous, unstable, totally self-centred, accustomed to putting themselves down, lost in a moral and affective desert, they owe their survival, in the final analysis, to that which helps push them farther and farther away from non-violent “negotiated society”.

Does all this mean that they are irretrievable? The efforts undertaken by thousands of associations and NGOs in poor urban areas prove that much can be done, provided that they are given the means to carry out the job at hand.

The first condition is to train mediators, who recognize these children as fully-fledged citizens and are familiar with their universe. These “street educators” know how to decipher these kids’ behaviour, communicate with them and orient them towards the appropriate social services.

The police also have a role to play. “In many countries, when everyone has deserted ‘high-risk’ zones, the police find themselves on the frontline,” says Tessler. “Of course we must denounce murder and torture of which a small minority is guilty, but it is also very important for the future to avoid constantly associating police with these exactions. We must teach them to approach kids without entering into the spiral of provocation. When the police lose their legitimacy, a vacuum is created and who occupies it? Religious extremists and the mafia, who arrive with a ‘package’ of clear-cut values and wads of money.” Like street educators, the police must know how to orient children towards structures capable of convincing them that they still have a place in society.

From there on in, a long apprenticeship can begin. This requires a lot of will-power on the part of the children and a lot of individual follow-up, perseverance, energy and considerable personal commitment on the part of educators. To teach children to play again, to know how to behave or speak correctly, to respect others, they use practical disciplines, usually including an introduction to business or a trade, and to all of the activities based on creativity: theatre, pantomime, dance, design, photo, video, etc. The hardest hit need psychotherapy, and the poor, that is to say, all of them, need material help to compensate for a drop in their earnings since they will be working less or not at all in the street.

This method has all the more chance of success if it involves families, who can often be identified. Experience proves that the degree of family cooperation conditions almost everything else, beginning with reinsertion into the classic education system, or professional training.

THEIR WORST ENEMY

“Educational concerns must focus both upon what happens outside the school, for example street violence, murder, etc.,... as well as what type of environment is being provided within the school,” insists Irving Epstein. These efforts must also be accompanied by an attempt to sensitize public opinion, which generally oscillates between indifference and hostility towards street children. “We must not forget that the population is often their worst enemy,” says Tessler. In some countries, where the child is looked upon as a small sub-adult - easily malleable and available for whatever needs to be done - the entire ancestral social system must be reformed in depth.

In Brazil, an unprecedented campaign to mobilize the media and voluntary organizations resulted in a small revolution: in a country where businessmen pay death squads to shoot them down, street children thus found themselves at the heart of the political debate. In June 1990, the new Statute of the Child and the Adolescent replaced the Code of Minors, utilized under the dictatorship as an instrument of repression. At the same time “tutelary councils” have been set up to monitor application of the Convention of the Rights of the Child in all municipalities. This is a first important step but one which, in Tessler’s opinion, is still “very abstract”.

As elsewhere, nothing will really change, he concludes, so long as “these children are rejected on all fronts”; so long as “social democracy remains but a faint glimmer”.

Sophie BOUKHARI
ANYWHERE BUT HOME

At 10, Ricardo hit the streets and prisons of Cape Town to escape his violent stepfather. Meanwhile in New York, Ravin finds himself kicked-out of home at 15 by his drug-addicted mother.

At 14, Ricardo Josephs spends his days roaming the streets of Cape Town (South Africa), panhandling from tourists and begging for scraps of food outside restaurants. Nights are spent in the doorways of businesses, huddled for warmth with the group of 10 or so boys he “hangs with” for protection and friendship.

Ricardo joins the ranks of the estimated 4,000 children living on the streets of the capital. Their average age seems to be 11, although many kids don’t know when they were born. Until recently, the authorities paid them little attention, with just two shelters set-up in the past 20 years. But now another shelter and training centre for girls, Ons Plek, is under construction with UNESCO’s financial assistance. In the meanwhile, kids can wash, see a doctor and continue their basic education at a community centre. While 80% of the street children are boys, the 20% made up of girls is on the rise along with child prostitution.

“I’m not a rent boy (prostitute),” Ricardo says defensively. “Some of the boys on the street get a good deal from their regulars and they scheme (think) they can live a nice life off rich men. But I’m not a homosexual, I’ve got a girlfriend.”

NEVER GOING BACK

Ricardo was born in the rural town of George, about 600 km from Cape Town. He ran away four years ago after an abusive stepfather knocked him unconscious.

“I miss my mother but she never did anything to help me,” he says. “Her husband is more important to her than her four children. I’m never going home again.”

With services and shelters lacking, Ricardo, like so many other homeless boys, is a frequent and forced guest at the city’s Pollsmoor Prison, despite President Mandela’s edict in 1994 forbidding the imprisonment of homeless children. “I’ve been in Pollsmoor three times since I got onto the streets,” says Ricardo, with a non-chalant shrug. “I’ve also been held at police stations a lot of times. I’m not scared of prison, but I don’t want to go back.”

But a tear rolls down his face when asked whether he was sexually abused by older youths. “They beat me, that’s all they did to me, nothing else. The bigger boys bully us. They steal our food and our blankets and there’s nothing we can do to stop them.”

Ricardo says that the first time he was held at Pollsmoor, he shared a cell with adult males - despite claims by the Department of Correctional Services that children are held separately. Ricardo also says that there is no provision for education. The kids are locked into their cells for 23 hours each day, with one hour spent outdoors for exercise in a concrete, walled courtyard.

“The last time I was at Pollsmoor it was a bit better. We had a television in our cell every second day and we could watch any programme we wanted.” Ricardo has never been convicted of a crime. All his spells in prison have been awaiting trial for minor offences. Amendments to the Correctional Service Act last May stipulated that juvenile court cases could not be postponed for more than 14 days and that children accused of minor offences could not be held in cells while waiting to appear in court. But two of the country’s nine prisons have no other secure places to hold children. Many of the children caught in this system join prison gangs, making for the disturbing paradox in which kids are introduced to criminality for the first time after they are arrested.

Rehana ROSSOUW
Cape Town

DOWN AND OUT IN NEW YORK CITY

“I was born in New York’s Elmhurst Hospital on October 25, 1975. Ever since I was 15 I’ve been in and out of the system. I’ve been benched, which in police terms means I spent four days on the street in January 1992.

“My mother had a drug problem. It was bad - she was pushing. You’d find drugs all over the place, in the couches, everywhere. My teachers knew I was having problems with her. She was using the social security checks for drugs.

“One afternoon she threatened to hit me. I told my guidance counsellor; she told my mother that charges would be filed against her. That’s when my mother told me to get my stuff out of the house. She didn’t want me there. I was too much trouble.

“That was when the snowstorms hit New York. I stayed in the hall of her apartment building, no food, no money, no nothing. I covered up with my coat, but the windows were open. I was numb all over, dizzy and weak. I stayed there after school, that night, the next day, another night and then the second day until about three.

“A neighbour came to check the roof and saw me. I couldn’t stop shaking. She didn’t want to get involved, but said, “boy, go get yourself something to eat”. I took the money and bought three slices of pizza and something to wash it down.

“I was too embarrassed to go to school. I had the address of the shelter the guidance counsellor gave me but my foot hurt. I walked to the hospital. They said I had frostbite. They put me in a psych ward because they felt I was going to kill myself. I did think about it, mostly because of my mother. I got out the next day, though, with a foot cast.

“I ended up in Covenant House but I kept going back to my mother. I mean she is my mother. My sister who lives in Colorado Springs knows about her, and told me to get out of there. She was smarter, but I am the only son and closer to my mother.

“I finally did go to Colorado Springs and got a job at a convenience store. I was making money, but after almost a year, I heard my mother was sick and I came back to help. It didn’t work out and I was back and forth at places and then at Covenant.

“This man there told me you can only go so low. Then you have to start at the beginning and correct the problem. I’m starting new. I’ve got a lot of anger, but I’m turning it around.”

Ravin, a 20-year-old black male, is now with the Covenant House, a non-governmental organization offering room, board and a stable living environment, so that he can continue his education and learn a trade.

Patrice ADCROFT
New York
A FAMILY AFFAIR

In Mexico, the Juconi Foundation gives priority to reintegrating street children into their families, and helping those families to cope better.

It began with “operation friendship” organized by the Juconi Foundation in favour of children on and in the streets of Puebla. This city of two million inhabitants “surrounded by 11 poor and marginalized states (including Chiapas and the state of Mexico) is a frequent stopover on the way to the capital,” explains Alison Lane, the director of Juconi. “We’ve calculated that there are between 120 and 150 street kids in Puebla and several thousand child workers.”

Since 1989, the Juconi Foundation, with UNESCO’s support from 1992 onwards, has helped more than 2,000 of these children.

Educators first observe the children before making contact. Young people from the foundation as well as familiar community members such as ticket vendors are used as mediators. “Initially, they just introduce themselves and show photographs illustrating the foundation’s activities. But when they come back, day after day, and invite the kids to eat a sandwich or to have a drink or even play a game of football.”

Over the next few months, the educators evaluate the children’s needs. They select those they feel will benefit most from the programmes. “We can’t help everybody and tend to concentrate on those kids who don’t go to school at all. We realize as well that there is little chance of ‘re recuperating’ a child who’s spent over three years in the streets.”

A TAILOR-MADE APPROACH

The foundation divides the kids into three categories: street living children; street working children (especially at bus stops and traffic lights); and market children.

The children who work in the streets, boys and girls aged from three to 17, have enormous difficulties reading, writing or even expressing themselves, since Spanish is not always their mother tongue. They are cared for at home. The educators (28 professionals helped by about 100 students in training at the foundation) work closely with a network of schools, training centres and companies to boost the children’s educational level and get them back into the system. This means they spend less time working in the street. To compensate for their loss of revenue, the foundation finds them small jobs in a protected professional environment, and scholarships to cover food, supplies, uniforms and transport to school. At the same time, they help to create a stable family environment by working with the parents, and particularly the mothers: more than 50% of these kids live in single parent households.

“We help these families to better manage their income. We stress the importance of punctuality and personal appearance and accompany them to job interviews. We also try to influence family dynamics. When children start earning money they start playing the big shot. But by going to school regularly, they usually learn to become children again.”

The market children are easier to integrate in group activities. They form a relatively homogenous population who live in the same area. The most motivated participate in the “day centre” which takes in between 170 and 180 each year for four or five hours daily. They are divided into groups according to their age, given elementary schooling and benefit from various services: food aid, showers, medical help... Twice a week they follow lessons in basic hygiene and health.

“All the kids have communication problems. We use music, mime, theatre and movement to help them identify their emotions and become aware of their bodies.”

The parents are involved here as well. Apart from literacy classes, they are taught to plan their shopping, to cook balanced meals and manage their homes.

Here they have access to the same services offered by the day centre as well as extra psychological support (group and individual therapy). To help them express themselves, the educators organize joint sessions each evening where the children try to free themselves from their “family anguish”. Those who are unable to take part, or whose families continue to reject them, go to foster homes in the region.

Support to the children continues for three years after they have left the foundation. “We follow their schooling, development and help strengthen family ties.” Out of 580 minors taken in charge during 1996, only 116 have returned to the streets. “When there is a failure, it means we’ve been unable to enlist the family’s help. Rehabilitation is a long and tortuous process. One child ran away from the Casa Juconi eight times. We managed to persuade him to come back and participate again. But street kids are very mobile. Sometimes we never find them again.”

S.B.

with Aurora VEGA in Puebla
FROM THE KORAN TO CARPENTRY

In Dakar, kids beg for their religious schoolmasters. But in the suburbs, a “modern” Koranic school offers boys and girls basic education and job training.

At 18, Coda Nguer is one of the oldest residents of the daara Islamic school in Malika, 20 km northeast of Dakar, where his mother sent him when he was nine. He decided to take a job as watchman at the school after five years learning carpentry there, rather than face the outside world. “I get 30 to 60 dollars a month which enables me to help my family,” he says, though he admits that he would like to go abroad one day and try his luck. The daara at Malika was built in 1980 after a group of women were “shocked to see hundreds of rootless and destitute taliban (pupils at Islamic schools) in the streets,” says one of its founders, Catherine Koate.

UNDER THE MARABOUT
For most parents, an Arab-Islamic education is a sacred duty. In the poorest families, it is sometimes seen as a way to avoid feeding another hungry child. A recent UNESCO survey found that 80% of all children attend more than 3,000 daaras in Senegal. There are only 2,434 formal primary schools in the country. However the daaras use out-of-date methods and lessons do not go beyond basic religious instruction in Arabic. The taliban are often forced to go begging and more than a thousand of them make a living that way in Dakar to support themselves and their priest-teacher, or marabout. After being handed over to the daara by their parents, some do not see their relatives for years. “Sometimes, after 15 years, the priests give the children back to families they don’t belong to,” says Koate.

For her, the moment of inspiration came when the young taliban who tended her mother’s garden died. “Like all of them, he ate anything at hand and died of food poisoning. The marabout could have saved him by raising the alarm.” Today, her daara - which is subsidized by the government and other organizations, including UNESCO since 1995 - has about 120 pupils, including some girls, who have been admitted as non-residents for the past five years.

Some of the children have come straight off the street, others have been sent by their parents or guardians or by public services such as the ministries of family affairs or justice. All of them arrive between the ages of five and nine and two-thirds of them live at the school. The Malika daara combines tradition and modernity, providing Koranic instruction but also basic education in three languages - Arabic, Wolof (the most-widely used local language) and French. “We have to be practical and think above all of the child’s interests,” says the teacher of a class of ten and eleven-year-olds, Abdou Khadre Sene. “In Senegal, knowing French is an advantage in getting a job.”

The education level of his pupils, he says, is “just as good” as at other schools in the capital. However, he only has to teach a class of 11 children, while the mainstream classes can have as many as 50 pupils. “At least half of them should qualify for entry to secondary schools,” he says. Not bad, considering only 10% of all primary schoolchildren in Senegal qualify.

What about those who don’t? The daara doesn’t let them leave empty-handed. Right from the beginning, the school teaches them how to tend crops and look after poultry. The mornings are devoted to their lessons but in the afternoon, pupils can grow vegetables on a small plot, look after fruit trees and help run the hen-house. In general, the older pupils look after the younger ones and are responsible for the upkeep of the equipment. Some of the children have really taken to farming and go on to pass exams to get further training.

The school’s carpentry workshop can train about 15 apprentices between the age of 14 and 17. About a year ago, it acquired most of the tools and staff needed. A master carpenter from Saint-Louis is training, over three years, the first proper class in furniture-making. Most of the pupils dream of setting up a business on their own. But not many manage to scrape together the initial capital required. With their solid training, they will probably find a job in a small existing carpentry shop for a tiny wage. The smartest of them will prosper by taking private job orders on the side unknown to their boss.

Koate is aware of the problems of finding employment in a crowded job market. There are plenty of carpenters working on the streets of Dakar. She wants to set up a new workshop to train pupils in electrical, telephone and television maintenance, but there is one major problem: electricity. The daara, which uses solar energy, is not yet connected to the national grid. And the city authorities are unwilling to hook it up on grounds of cost because the school is in an “out of the way” place.

So the future of the Malika taliban is far from secure. So far, a few former pupils have passed their high school exams and gone on to higher education. Others have started up small businesses or gone abroad. But most of them get by as best they can, picking up any little jobs they find. One or two even come back and ask for help from the daara. But none of them - pupils, apprentices or those without work - go begging on the street.

Aminata TOURE
Dakar
IN COLD BLOOD ...

The youngest was less than one year old, the eldest 21. These 48 children, who lived in the miserable condition or killed by stray bullets. Their photos were collected during an investigation carried out by two journalists for...
Children of Sao Paulo’s favelas, are among the thousands who have been murdered by Brazil’s drug lords and police, the Burti printing company, which published them in its 1997 calendar.
SETTLING THE DUST

Getting Viet Nam’s street children back into school means convincing their families that education is a profitable investment.

They call them the “buổi doi” - “dust of life”. Indeed, the street children of Viet Nam’s big cities are growing in number every day and non-governmental organizations say the capital, Ho Chi Minh City, has as many as 50,000. Nearly all maintain regular contact with their parents or some other member of their family, even if only a distant uncle.

Most are excluded from the official school system, in which “there is a drop-out rate of 20% a year in poor neighbourhoods and which, like the rest of the country, is inconsistent,” says Nelly Le Priol, a volunteer with Ecoles sans frontières (ESF - Schools Without Borders). ESF has set up in Viet Nam the “Schools of Hope” programme of the Christina Noble Association which aims to get children back into the official system or to attend a vocational training centre. Financed by UNESCO since the end of 1992, it has trained teachers and repaired 13 informal schools founded for the very poor by volunteers or former teachers pushed out by the communist regime.

BARRIERS

“These schools, where the teachers are seldom qualified, are at the bottom of a four-level scale,” says Le Priol. “Above the ‘schools of hope’, you have the Pho Cap, the ‘alternative’ state schools which provide, often free, a basic education programme of 10 hours a week. Then there’s the Pho Thong, the formal state schools, and at the very top the private or semi-private schools.”

However getting street children back into any sort of class can be difficult. “At 16 or 17, some of them don’t want to sit alongside children who are much younger to learn to read and write,” says Le Priol. But mostly it’s their families which keep them away, often because the fees and school gear are too expensive, sometimes because their papers are not in order (if, for example, they have left their area of residence without permission to go and work in the city), and nearly always because children who attend classes don’t earn any income.

These families only have about $15-20 a month to buy food and, often, repay loans carrying about 30% monthly interest. “The teachers visit them to try to persuade them to send their children to school, but they rarely succeed,” says Le Priol. “One woman said she’d rather send her daughter out to be a prostitute than to school.”

To win them over, ESF has tried two methods - providing meals to the poorest children through women’s associations or counselling the families and giving them an allowance to buy healthier food for the children. “We really prefer the first solution, but the second has proved the most effective,” says Maïté Barrès of ESF. “Not only did some children gain in height and weight but their parents or relatives came regularly to the monthly meetings organized by the teachers and at the end of which the allowances were paid. At first, they didn’t take part in the proceedings. But bit by bit, they began to talk with the teachers. A certain trust developed. In some neighbourhoods, when the children were able to return to the state schools, parents were reluctant.” But they will have to get used to the idea because the ‘schools of hope’ won’t be there forever, notes Barrès. “One day the government will knock them all down. It’s already on the drawing board.”

The programme also provides scholarships and has developed a system of micro-credits. It was intended to help the children indirectly by enabling the women in the family to set up income-earning activities. “This has been a failure,” admits Barrès. “We’ve managed to improve life for some families but they’ve rarely reinvested money in the children by registering them in a formal school or buying them books or more nourishing food.”

Aside from the problems of obligatory cooperation with the neighbourhood committees, which supervise the schools and which are stifling in some places, the small loans (about $37 repayable over three months at interest of 2% a month) have sometimes enabled the women to expand their small businesses. But most of them use it to guard against misfortune, “I used it all to buy medicine,” said one. Another woman repaired her shack. A third paid back a harassing moneylender. “One crafty person even lent out the money to others at a higher interest rate,” says Le Priol.

Do such efforts have any long-term effect? “Despite the failures of some parts of the programme, what we’ve done with the parents is useful,” says Barrès. “If they have listened at all, even for a little while, something will always remain.” The low drop-out rate in the schools of hope, ranging between eight to 12%, is another plus. “But the most encouraging result is without a doubt the work done with the education services and the public schools in re-integrating these kids in the official system: about 100 have been able to get back into the Pho Cap and a smaller group in Pho Thong.”

S. B. 
BUCHAREST BLUES

Social workers in Romania want to throw off their prison guard image and learn how to help the country’s rising tide of street children.

Kids who don’t know how to play?" Elena Mihaita never believed this possible until 1993, when she decided to work with street children. “Some of them have spent up to four years on the street. When they turned up here, at the Gavroche Reception Centre, they didn’t know what to do with a fork or toothbrush, or even a toy,” says Mihaita, a graduate of Bucharest’s Polytechnic Institute.

“In Romania, street children are the result of the very difficult transition which the country is going through,” emphasizes Rodica Caciula, the director of Equilibre-Romania, a non-governmental organization. But in fact, the phenomenon dates back to the Ceaucescu regime, with policies promoting high birth rates among a poverty-stricken population. The ranks of unwanted, abandoned children crowded into orphanages and other institutions which were “as closed as the prisons. The children were trained to be useful to industry, as everything was orientated towards this sector,” explains Caciula. After Ceaucescu’s fall, they escaped from these internment camps, to the streets, where they were joined by other children, fleeing homes rocked by hardship and domestic violence that accompanied the economic crisis.

Between 1,500 and 3,000 children live in Bucharest’s streets, train stations and sewers, which may stink but stay warm in winter.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE

“But today, the government doesn’t have the same means nor instruments,” says Caciula. “The children’s centres are now wide open. And the problem is that there is no training available to the people working in these centres. So without stimulating and attractive programmes, they have a hard time keeping the kids.”

The only training programme ever offered was held from October 1993 to February 1994. Set up by the French association Equilibre and financed by UNESCO, it was offered to the some 50 employees (two-thirds of whom were women) of all the city’s centres working with street children. “The course helped us to look at these kids differently - to better understand why they behave the way they do - and to stop jumping to conclusions,” explains Aurel Cristescu of the Ciresarui Centre, where police dump young vagabonds and delinquents. Before the programme, the staff acted like “prison guards”, without the means to offer any entertaining or creative educational activities, according to Patricia Dhont, who coordinated the courses.

Above all, the participants learned to question the way they viewed the children, even if some of them have since quit their jobs: 39 instructors out the 57 attended more than 5 sessions out of the 24 organized. “I thought I knew it all but now I realize that I know nothing,” admits a participant. “In the name of genetics, the children’s behaviour was seen as something that couldn’t really be changed and therefore bore no connection to the responsibility of the instructor,” explains Dhont, adding that the participants were generally “very eager to learn more about behaviour”. Through role-playing exercises, videos and just by watching the way the instructors interacted with the kids and by meeting with psychologists, they learned to establish affectionate relationships in reaching out to the children and creating an almost familial atmosphere. “I want to get rid of the monotony in my work and make it more dynamic, even on the rainiest afternoon,” says George, who learned to use art, literature, games and sports to animate his centre. “At first, I didn’t know how to deal with the kids when they got into these aggressive fits, especially the ones who had been sniffing glue,” says Elena Mihaita.

Now, she knows that “most of the time, you just have to speak in a gentle voice, cuddle them and give a sense of warmth”. And learning some basics in sociology and law helps her deal with the police.

But the programme couldn’t fill all the loopholes: participants regret not having met with medical professionals or having learnt to teach manual skills. Certification remains another major problem. “They are already being paid poorly. If at least we could offer them a certificate recognized by the health ministry, they would have some professional incentive to continue working in this field,” says Marilena Buttu, director of the Gavroche Centre. She estimates that almost half of the trainees have left the profession for better paying jobs.

Social workers generally earn $25 per month, far less than the average salary of about $60 and barely more than the minimum wage ($17). But “this training must continue at all costs,” insists Caciula, who is seeking funding for more courses.

In the meanwhile, a Social Worker’s Guide financed by UNESCO will be released at the end of this June in Romanian, French and English. “It will be the first of its kind in Romania,” points out Georgeta Jurcan, part of the editorial team.

“We organized this training to set an example,” says Caciula. “But we must continue to prevent the situation from getting worse and to support these social workers who are under constant stress.”

Mihaela RODINA
Bucharest
FROM INQUISITOR TO GUARDIAN

Changing police attitudes to street children in countries like Brazil is a life or death issue for these kids, but one that much of society ignores, or even opposes.

In countries like ours, turning a political police force into one for ordinary citizens is a very important step on the road to democracy,” says Brazilian political scientist Gisalio Cerqueira Filho. Cerqueira knows what he is talking about. He had to go back to his job at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro after a programme he was running to educate police about the rights of children living on the streets was abruptly scrapped.

For the children concerned, the issue is a matter of life and death. A fair number of the thousands of them killed in Brazil each year (45,469 between 1979 and 1994, according to official figures), are murdered by police. According to the public prosecutor in Sao Paulo, for example, the police are reponsible for a quarter of such deaths there.

The secret links between drug smugglers, death squads and some policemen have put the whole force under a cloud. The police terrorize people instead of reinserting these children in society and the rest of society, especially enabled them to update their knowledge on the law and, for 54% of them, to revise their ideas about children. “We had some concrete results but we face the fact that very many police were more interested in having fancy weapons than hearing about human rights,” said Cerquiera. Some politicians and others have undertaken the training, the courses especially enabled them to update their knowledge on the law and, for 54% of them, to revise their ideas about children.

“Media resistance,” says Cerqueira. “In Rio, the main media group, TV Globo, was against us. All the work we did in the daytime was cancelled out each evening when the police sat in front of their TVs and got the message that life was impossible in Rio without severe repression of Afro-Brazilians.”

What is the overall result of this initiative, which was cut short in 1995 after the government of Rio state changed hands? “We had some concrete results but we have to face the fact that very many police were more interested in having fancy weapons than hearing about human rights,” said Cerquiera. Some politicians and others have reacted to the recent extension of legal protection of minors by demanding the lowering of the age of criminal responsibility from 18 to 16 - even to 14.

But the need to change how the police treat children goes beyond Rio. Such a scheme is also needed, for example, in Peru, where 11,000 children live on the streets, according to UNICEF. Since April 1994, the police, along with the Swedish Radda Barnen Association have, with UNESCO’s help, devised courses for officers in 15 regions of the country.

Called “care and follow-up for children and teenagers,” the year-long training consists of eight months of study and writing of a final report, which must propose new attitudes, activities and work methods.

Four courses are on offer - the special problems of children and adolescents, laws, psychology and social work, and the policy of supervision needed. According to a questionnaire put to the students who have undertaken the training, the courses especially enabled them to update their knowledge on the law and, for 54% of them, to revise their ideas about children.

“We approach them now in a much more constructive and less repressive way,” said a senior officer from Huancayo.

“The course gave me another view of children: not just human beings to protect but also people with rights,” said a police commander from Lima.

So far the programme has involved 1,147 officers and late last year was extended to non-commissioned officers. Directors of police training in several other Latin American countries will meet in Lima at the end of this year to discuss how to expand the programme beyond Peru.

TO FIND OUT MORE …

WORKING WITH STREET CHILDREN. Published with the International Catholic Child Bureau, the book presents 18 projects aiming to reinsert these children in society and their families (UNESCO/BICE, 1995).

STREET AND WORKING CHILDREN. In a few paragraphs, the fold-out presents UNESCO’s major approaches to helping these children.

BLOSSOMS IN THE DUST - STREET CHILDREN IN AFRICA. Education specialist Jean-Pierre Velis looks at the educational problems linked to these children (UNESCO, 1993).

INNOV DATABASE 1995, INNOVATIVE BASIC EDUCATION PROJECTS. Everything you need to know about 112 educational projects designed for children and adults in difficult situations (UNESCO/UNICEF, 1995).

TRAVELLING EXHIBITION. 16 thematic displays available from UNESCO (1994).

THE HEART ALONE SEES CLEARLY (see p.17).
Renowned photographers and poets peer into the eyes of the world’s children in need.

All proceeds go directly to the programme’s activities.

Price: 120 FF
Central and Eastern European artists and policy experts try to breathe new energy into a cultural life saddled by economic woes.

Is Professor Ralf Dahrendorf right? The distinguished German-born sociologist, currently Master of St. Anthony’s College, Oxford, has said that if the countries of Central and Eastern Europe needed six months to free themselves from dictatorship and the one-party state, they would need six years to transform their economies and 60 to revive their cultural and intellectual life and develop a civil society. A familiar figure in Hungarian cultural policy, Ivan Vitanyi, questioned Dahrendorf’s thesis at the end of a UNESCO-sponsored conference on the preservation and development of cultural life in Central and Eastern Europe, held in Budapest from 23-26 January.

According to Vitanyi, who is chairman of the Hungarian parliament’s cultural commission, the economic transformation might need more than six years. But, he said, the prospects for cultural renaissance were better than Dahrendorf thought, since the countries making the transition from socialism were better off culturally than economically. One Czech speaker went so far as to declare that from Warsaw to Tallin, from Budapest to Zagreb, from Prague to Kiev, people are in some respects culturally more sophisticated than the average citizen in Western Europe.

A HEAVY BURDEN

We could argue at length about whether that difference can be measured and if such a comparison makes any sense. Personally, I agree with the violinist Yehudi Menuhin, who once told me that without composers like Bartok of Hungary and Enesco of Romania - that is, Central and Eastern European cultures - the culture of Europe would not be complete.

This idea was expressed by many speakers at the conference. But, they said, this precious heritage is also in danger of collapsing under the burden of economic transition. Vitanyi stressed that daily economic challenges obviously must be met.

The question was whether the countries of the region were going to replace one form of under-development by another or whether, once on their feet, they could hope one day to reach Western European standards.

Dramatic complaints and predictions were two a penny. A Hungarian professor, head of one of the country’s most important public opinion organizations, said the two big cultural losers in the transition were books and cinema. In real terms, people are now spending 20% less on books and cinema tickets than they were at the end of the 1980s. This is because more and more people feel shut out of the market. According to the Czech speaker, it is the smaller libraries that are most threatened in the Czech Republic. For example, children’s books, flourishing not so long ago, have all but disappeared, he said.

AN ENDANGERED BOLSHOI

In the latest Czech budget, without adjusting for inflation, culture gets 6% less than last year. “And no-one tells us how we can make up for that 6%,” insisted Dana Ryslinkova, who runs a cultural institute in Prague. She thinks it is not necessarily ‘high culture’ or the major institutions which are in danger but the smaller, more modest cultural institutions and creators who are at risk. But all this depends on the country concerned. A British expert in cultural management noted that the famous Bolshoi Theatre was just as much on the verge of bankruptcy as any small theatre.

One impassioned speaker said that in Lithuania, writers and painters could no longer even afford to buy paper and canvases. From there, it was a short step to doom-laden predictions that Central European culture, with its myriad roots, would die out, washing away in what a speaker from Dresden called a spreading ocean of “MacDonald-ism”.

The situation is indeed alarming and there is every reason to be gloomy. But if 120 experts from 23 countries could gather on the banks of the Danube just to say all this - brought together by UNESCO, the Hungarian authorities, the Hungarian National Commission for UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the European Commission in Brussels and the European Mozarteum Foundation - it means there’s still hope. Besides, listing complaints, no matter how valid, won’t solve anything and, in fact, only increases the atmosphere of crisis. Robert Fitzpatrick, a professor at Columbia

A BALANCING ACT

Along the same theme, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) has just released a new edition of the book LOOTING IN ANGKOR, which presents photos and descriptions of objects stolen from the Dépôt de la Conservation d’Angkor with the aim of sensitizing professionals, the press and the public to this problem. Thanks to the previous edition, released in 1993, six objects sold at auction houses were identified, some of which were returned to Cambodia.
University (USA), rightly noted that the post-socialist world was undergoing dramatic changes. Yet cultural policy is rising from the ashes in all these countries and responsibility for it needs to be defined.

A senior Hungarian cultural official called for “a new realism” in the tough process of transition. Central Europeans, living with GDP-levels (gross domestic product) similar to that of Turkey, he said, cannot expect to have access to the same range of cultural offerings as, say, people living in The Netherlands. The “new realism” means that the cultural “consumer” has to pay more for the real costs of culture. At the same time, long-term contributions by the private sector and individuals, along with state subsidies, will continue to play essential roles.

The problem is very tricky. What does “long-term” mean? What should be done about cultural institutions and activities threatened with closure by spiralling costs and prices? According to the Hungarian official, we are living in a true age of miracles since, given the financial resources, at least half of all cultural life should have already disappeared.

I don’t agree with him. It’s more a period of painful transition than miracles. And besides, there is no ignoring yet another unfortunate sign for Central and Eastern Europe: money for culture is also in short supply in other parts of the world. This doesn’t comfort us, but it forces us to look beyond the end of our noses. An American delegate observed that, while the Budapest conference was taking place, the congress in the United States was debating a proposal to cut off government funding of the arts.

So we see that our region isn’t the only one where concert audiences have fallen off. In the United States too, there’s concern that concert halls will soon be turned into clubs for elderly music-lovers. Young people in general are less and less interested in classical music.

Alain Coblence, the president of the European Mozart Federation - the only private body to directly sponsor the Budapest meeting - says cultural financing is in deep crisis everywhere in the West and warns politicians against a laissez-faire attitude. Many speakers said governments should play an important part in maintaining culture and preserving national identity.

Culture is too important to be left to market forces. But the state cannot do it alone. Only an arrangement involving business, individuals and better-organized non-profit groups can reinvigorate the ancient cultures of Central and Eastern Europe which are themselves in full transition. Proof of that lies in the new multinational shopping centres, which have a cultural role of their own. At Duna Plaza, central Budapest’s new commercial complex, there are also bookshops and cinemas.

Maybe the experts and decision-makers should follow the advice of General de Gaulle: take charge of what’s inevitable. So a British speaker at the conference was perhaps right to disagree with Dahrendorf and say that the region’s culture would catch up with the West in only 20 years, not 60.

Federico Mayor also inaugurated a new training centre for journalists in Moscow, created with UNESCO’s assistance, to offer courses in informatics, advertising, media management and other subjects.

What does the future hold for Slovakia’s alternative theatre?

Local initiatives providing education for all are mobilizing entire communities. Five such projects shine in a 15-minute video entitled Achieving Education for All. The video moves from a community in El Salvador where everyone is pitching in to manage the school, to isolated villages in Thailand and Senegal, where programmes for adults and children are rooted in local traditions, before taking off for a school in Egypt where girls make up 80% of the class and ending in Canada with some 100 communities providing literacy training for adults.
Scientists meet in Jerusalem to find ways of controlling the monster they helped to create - biological weapons.

“As scientists we must take responsibility for our discoveries and innovations, and even more importantly, we must be aware that they can be used for evil purposes as well as positive ones, and thus try to control their uses,” says Yehiel Becker. A professor of the UNESCO - Hebrew University International School for Molecular Biology and Microbiology, Becker organized the Second International Symposium on Science for Peace, with the Organization’s support, held in Jerusalem from January 20-23.

A central theme of the symposium was the dangers of biological warfare. Seventeen countries are suspected of developing these arms. This research could potentially lead to the widespread development of missiles whose warheads are charged with diseases such as anthrax. Indeed some countries already have this capacity. “No one knows exactly how many warheads like this exist, but estimates put the number in the thousands,” says Jonathan Levy, a medical student at Northwestern University in the United States, who recently spent a year researching the subject and presented his findings at the conference.

“Biological warfare is not a new problem. During World War II, there was a tremendous amount of research done into the possibility of using diseases to kill people quickly. Both the Allies and the Axis powers conducted such research. But Japan was exceptional in its use of human beings to test its findings. They’d take a prisoner of war, put him in an empty field, drop an anthrax bomb and see how long he could survive,” says Levy. “Ten thousand POWs died that way.”

International attempts to ban the use of biological weapons date back to 1925 with the Geneva Protocol on Poisonous Gases. But it took almost 50 years to see the next major legislative step aiming to destroy or convert these weapons to peaceful use. The Convention on the Prohibition of the
fears that these weapons will be made even more lethal with the misuse of technological developments such as recombinant DNA techniques and microbiology.

Under the umbrella of the “Science for Peace” conference, scientists discussed what can they can do to try to control the monster that they have helped to create. It was a lively debate with many different opinions on how best to deal with the problem. Prof. Falaschi for example believes that the best solution is to conduct inspections in the countries suspected of producing them.

A SINGLE MOLECULE

“Despite the existing treaty, we know Saddam Hussein had 25 SCUD missiles with biological weapons mounted on them during the Gulf War,” says Falaschi. “Clearly, without universal ratification of agreements, there can be no safety. But we also need inspection systems. It is almost impossible not to leave a trace when you make biological weapons. There is a new technique which can detect a single molecule of DNA. So for example you can easily find a trace of anthrax through evidence of its DNA. It literally leaves a trail we can follow. We can take wet filters and touch surfaces in which we suspect there has been contact with a biological weapon, or use filters in which air passes through, which can tell us if there has been contact.

“These methods can transform the search for biological weapons. I believe the UN should be a party in ensuring ratification (of the biological weapons convention), and also in conducting inspections for the application of the treaty.”

Other scientists, such as Prof. Kenneth Berns, President of the American Society of Microbiology, argue that the best way to stop the proliferation of biological weapons would be to concentrate on strictly regulating the institutions currently researching infectious diseases.

“Recently someone in the US ordered a plague bacillus from an American research institute. The researchers sent it, but got suspicious afterwards and told the authorities. It turned out the recipient was a member of a right-wing militia,” says Berns. “So the US government has started to formulate regulations to stop that kind of potential for domestic terrorism.”

DANGER

Others at the conference say the only way to stop biological weapons is through promoting peace with one’s neighbours.

“A disease doesn’t identify you as an Arab or Jew; it doesn’t ask if you are from Gaza or Jerusalem. Living so closely together in this region, if a bomb carrying a biological weapon falls, everyone in the area - Jordanians, Palestinians, Israelis - will be affected. We have to co-operate to stop that danger,” points out Abed Al Nasser, a medical student from Gaza now completing his studies at the Hebrew University.

But all the scientists agreed on the proposal of Prof. Becker, which calls on universities around the world to include in their graduation ceremonies for scientists an oath, similar to the Hippocratic oath taken by graduates of medical schools. This proposed scientific oath is now being formulated by five students who attended the conference. The participants also agreed on a statement which will be directed to UNESCO and which was signed by all participants.

“Through the Statement for Peace and the introduction of the Science for Peace Oath we will try to ensure that science graduates in the future will be dedicated to pursuing science for peaceful purposes and not aggressive ones” says Becker.

Dina SHILOH
Jerusalem

THE JERUSALEM STATEMENT

At the closing of the symposium, the participants called on all individuals and institutions working “in science and for science” to work towards ensuring that all scientific endeavours and achievements be used only for peaceful purposes and humanity’s greater benefit. They also appealed for the free flow and sharing of information and knowledge and an open academic environment committed to the free expression of ideas.
Some 150 policy-makers, university administrators, student leaders and representatives from more than 40 non-governmental organizations met at Headquarters from 10 to 12 February to exchange views on “Higher Education: The Consequences of Change for GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT”. Discussing ways of training today’s students for tomorrow’s jobs, they insisted on offering “professional and technical skills as well as living skills”. This training “must be balanced with education on human rights, democracy, peace and social justice,” said Hanan Ashrawi, the Minister of Higher Education of the Palestinian National Authority.

Fed up with gratuitously violent television programmes, YOUNG PEOPLE want to produce their own programmes in their own language. Through UNESCO’s Special Fund for Youth, the ZDF German TV Network has contributed to this, providing 500 video cassettes for youth-oriented programmes in the Balkans and editing equipment for a new youth channel in Cuba.

Reinforcing the training and the role of AFRICAN TEACHERS is the theme of two new publications issued by the UNESCO office in Dakar. The first (No. 15) envisages educational reforms designed for Africa’s technological future, while the second publication (No. 16) analyzes the results of a study of pedagogic needs conducted in 16 universities in 11 Anglophone African countries. Professors indicated a need for support in developing and applying teaching strategies and integrating media-based tools.

The Crimea, warns the UN, “has become a region of simmering separatist, ethnic and nationalist tensions that, if unchecked, could turn the peninsula on the Black Sea into an area of conflict.”

To help defuse the situation and contribute to building peace and stability in the region UNESCO, joining a larger United Nations programme, is running an education and training project for marginalized youth and, in particular, the Tatar population.

The Tatars, who were accused of collaborating with the Germans during the second world war and sent into exile by Stalin in 1944, started going home in 1991 when the Crimea was restored as an autonomous republic within the Ukraine. Some 250,000 people have already returned, and as many more are expected back in the near future. Their struggle now is against the discrimination and economic difficulties wracking the whole country.

50% JOBLESS

Since Ukraine’s independence in 1991, Crimea’s economy - based on agriculture, ship building, light industry and tourism - has flourished. Unemployment is soaring: 50% of the returnees are out of work.

Based in two communities, scattered on the hills around the peninsula’s capital of Simferopol, where a large number of Tatars are now resettling, the UNESCO project aims to provide leadership and organizational skills to young people. “The long-term stability of the Crimea depends to a large extent on how the young feel about their future,” says Marc Gilmer, a UNESCO programme specialist. “Education and jobs are the keys to turning the situation around.”

The first 10-month phase of the project, started last July, is training young people who can “lead, motivate and co-ordinate with project staff”. It is also providing 1,000 young unemployed people between the ages of 15 to 25 with courses in sewing, knitting, car maintenance, computer skills, leather work and television repair.

To boost job prospects, the project team is negotiating with the ministry of education to obtain formal accreditation for the courses. Two community centres have been opened to serve as a meeting place where people from different ethnic groups can gather and socialize. Young men and women are also encouraged to take up sports activities, join a dance troupe or produce handicrafts to help foster a community spirit.

“We want to draw on the knowledge that already exists in the communities,” said Gilmer. “As half of the population in the settlements are senior citizens, they have been drawn in to pass on their knowledge and skills to the younger generation. As far as possible, staff are recruited from inside the settlements on a voluntary basis.”

The project is part of a larger programme by the Ukrainian Government, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the UN Office for Project Services. This five-year, $15 million undertaking addresses issues of health, housing, education, infrastructure and human rights.

If successful, the UN hopes that the programme could be used as a model in other countries facing similar problems of reintegration and civil strife.
CHILDREN HAVE RIGHTS TOO!

Africa’s development may well depend on the priority it gives to the right of its children to education.

“Dear parents, bringing a child into the world is not enough in itself to earn the title of ‘mother’ and ‘father’! A child doesn’t grow like weeds...” This call to order from 12-year-old Déogratrices Nitiema, a student from a provincial college in Burkina Faso, set the tone for the African Regional Summit on Children’s Rights, Education and Development held in Ouagadougou from 17 to 21 February. The summit was the first of a series organized by UNESCO and the French-based Fondation pour l’Enfance, designed to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Almost a dozen of Africa’s first ladies, who’ve committed themselves to this issue, attended.

Déogratice’s opening message, charged with youthful directness and simplicity, went further. “We would like the religious and traditional authorities to know that we hold them partly responsible for our poor level of education and the impact this has had on the development and evolution of society...”

She struck home. “Times have changed,” protested Dr. Lallé Naaba, the minister for information for the Mossi monarchy - Burkina’s traditional government that co-exists with the “modern” one. “Customs have changed. There are many intellectuals among the traditional chiefs. They are educated people who understand the importance of education.”

Nonetheless, the statistics for education in Africa tell an alarming story. In most countries south of the Sahara, overall enrolment wavers between 30% and 40% of the school-age population. The situation for girls is worse. In Burkina, only about 10% of girls go to school. In some provinces African states have signed the various international conventions concerning children’s rights. In Addis-Ababa, July, 1990, Africa’s own Charter for the Rights and Well-Being of the Child came into being, proclaiming in Article 11 the right to education for every child. Non-governmental organizations are also active in this field.

For most of the conference participants, the problem, for girls especially, arises from the big gap between “modern education” inherited from the colonial powers, and the realities of African social organization and ways of thinking. Economic difficulties further complicate the situation, with education budgets being squeezed everywhere.

The summit didn’t come up with any clear-cut answers. However, it helped to push children’s rights, and particularly that of education, a little higher on the political agenda, and fed public debate.

The stakes in Africa are high. Almost half the continent’s population, south of the Sahara, is less than 20 years old. Future development will depend upon these youngsters. Success will depend upon their capabilities, their knowledge. As Halidou Ouédraogo, the president of Burkina Faso’s movement for human rights and the rights of peoples, concluded “we need to make people aware of the importance of education ... and we have a long way to go.”

Bamba BOGNA YAYA
Ouagadougou
Some 25 new Secretaries-General of UNESCO’S NATIONAL COMMISSIONS will attend an information seminar organized at Headquarters from 7 to 18 April. In Dakar (Senegal) from 21 to 25 April, a regional seminar on EDUCATION AND AIDS will gather representatives of health and education ministries and non-governmental organizations to examine activities aimed at promoting awareness of this fatal disease. The Intergovernmental Committee of the World Decade for CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT (1988-1997) will hold its fifth ordinary session at Headquarters from 21-25 April to review proposals for follow-up activities undertaken by the Organization. World BOOK AND COPYRIGHT Day will be celebrated throughout the UN system on 23 April. From 27 to 29 April, experts specializing in reading techniques, computer programming and distance education will explore “VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS and the Role of the Teacher” at a meeting in Milton Keynes (UK). Religious leaders, decision-makers and representatives of NGOs will gather in Dakar (Senegal) from 28-30 April, for a regional conference to promote the VALUES OF TOLERANCE. World PRESS FREEDOM Day will be celebrated throughout the UN system on 3 May. From 4 to 8 May in Tunis (Tunisia), a regional symposium on the ARAB WORLD AND THE INFORMATION SOCIETY will bring together diverse partners - from telecommunication companies to health-care providers - to examine national strategies for increasing access to these new technologies. Cooperation in managing natural resources and limiting coastal erosion and pollution in the NORTH AND CENTRAL WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN will be the focus of a regional committee meeting of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission scheduled for 6-10 May in Mombasa (Kenya). The executive committee for the International Campaign for the Nubia Museum and the National Museum of EGYPTIAN CIVILIZATION will hold its ninth session in Aswan from 12-15 May.

(Dates are subject to change.)

OUR NEXT DOSSIER will highlight the key role the media can play in democratization and in assuring peace by presenting several of the projects receiving UNESCO’s assistance.