

# Background: The International Conference on Population and Development

At the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, the international community began to recognize the complex realities that link population, the environment and development. The new dialogue at Rio helped produce an historic agreement in 1994 at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, Egypt.

## A New Approach

The ICPD defined a comprehensive, ambitious two-decade agenda for meeting human needs, stabilizing global population and promoting sustainable development. The ICPD consensus was a new beginning for international population and development programs—abandoning rigid, top-down demographic targets for a rights-based approach. Its sweeping “Programme of Action” seeks to empower women, protect the environment and meet people’s basic needs in such areas as education, nutrition and health. Its overarching purpose is to enable individuals and couples to determine freely and responsibly the timing and spacing of their children.

Consensus was forged from diverse perspectives, linking those concerned about the sheer number of humans on the earth on the one hand, with those wanting to promote women’s health and rights on the other. This rights-based approach holds that smaller families and a stable population will result

naturally from meeting people’s basic needs—for family planning and reproductive health care, basic health care, education and human rights.

At the ICPD, countries recognized the complex context in which decisions about childbearing are made. For example, the action plan reflects a sober reality: when families believe their children will survive, they have fewer children; healthy women have healthier families; education and other opportunities for women allow them to make better decisions about if, when, and how many children to have, and to contribute to development; both rapid population growth **and** wasteful resource use can have negative environmental effects; and family planning is most effective as part of a full range of reproductive health services.

The ICPD consensus also defines reproductive and sexual health and reproductive rights; recognizes unsafe abortion as a major public health problem; calls for the protection and promotion of the rights of adolescents to reproductive health education, information and care provided with privacy, confidentiality, respect and informed consent; calls for eliminating discrimination against girls in nutrition, health care, early marriage, pregnancy and childbearing; and recognizes family planning as a means of achieving sustainable development and protecting the environment.

### ICPD Goals

Key goals of the Programme of Action (updated at the ICPD five-year review) include:

- Achieving by 2015 universal access to reproductive health care, including: safe and effective family planning, pre- and post-natal care, essential obstetric care, infertility treatment, and prevention and management of reproductive tract infections, including sexually transmitted infections (STIs);
- Reducing maternal mortality rates to half the 1990 levels by the year 2000, and by half again in 2015;
- Increasing the presence of skilled attendants at birth to at least 78 percent by 2005;
- Reducing infant mortality to below 35 deaths per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to below 45 per 1,000 live births by 2015;
- Ensuring that 90 percent of 15- to 24-year-olds have access to information and services by 2005 to help them avoid HIV infection; and
- Achieving universal access to primary education by 2015, and closing the gender gap in primary and secondary school by 2005.

### Millennium Development Goals

In 2000, the world community reaffirmed the ICPD aims when it adopted at the UN Millennium Summit the following goals:

- Reducing by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio;
- Reducing by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality ratio;

- Ensuring that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling; and
- Halting by 2015, and beginning to reverse, the spread of HIV/AIDS.

### UNFPA – Catalyst for Change

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) helped catalyze the ICPD consensus and works to advance the Millennium Development Goals. UNFPA promotes reproductive health and rights, gender equality and male responsibility, and seeks to empower women everywhere. UNFPA believes all couples and individuals have the right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children, as well as the right to the information and means to do so.

Meeting the ICPD and Millennium Development goals will improve global quality of life and help stabilize world population. UNFPA believes that the ICPD action plan will help achieve sustainable social and economic development that meets human needs, ensures the population's well-being and protects the natural resources on which all life depends.

To achieve these objectives, UNFPA assists developing countries in more than 140 countries around the world. It provides family planning supplies, maternal and child health care, and services to prevent STIs and HIV/AIDS, in humanitarian emergencies as well as in daily life. UNFPA also lends its voice to global women's issues and advocates for increased resources and political will in the fields of population, environment and development.

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