

REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION OF
THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

FULFILLING THE ICPD PROMISE

PROGRESS, GAPS AND WORKING AT SCALE



This is a reprint of the Report of the Secretary-General, Monitoring of population programs, focusing on the review and appraisal of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as prepared by the Technical Division of UNFPA, for the Fifty-second session of the Commission on Population and Development, 2019. The present reprint includes supplementary Tables and Figures provided by UNFPA.

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CONTENTS

Foreword.....	3
Summary.....	5
Introduction.....	6
CHAPTER I. DIGNITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS: WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED?	8
1.1 Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment.....	9
1.2 Education.....	14
1.3 Decent Work.....	16
1.4 Widespread Gains in Health, including Sexual and Reproductive Health.....	19
CHAPTER II. HUMAN MOBILITY, DISPLACEMENT AND HUMANITARIAN CRISES	32
CHAPTER III. POPULATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE	36
CHAPTER IV. LEFT BEHIND OR PUSHED BEHIND? ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS	40
CHAPTER V. CONTRIBUTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT TO THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	44
CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ROAD AHEAD	48
6.1 Conclusions.....	49
6.2 Recommendations for the Road Ahead.....	50

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: More girls are at risk of FGM.....	11
Figure 2: Number of countries that legally ban female genital mutilation, 1994–present.....	11
Figure 3: More girls are at risk of child marriage.....	12
Figure 4: Gross enrolment in secondary school.....	14
Figure 5: Unemployment among youth aged 15 to 24 in 2018.....	16
Figure 6: Working poverty rate among youth aged 15 to 24 who are employed and living on less than \$1.90 per day in 2018.....	17
Figure 7: Youth unemployment, 1994–2018.....	18
Figure 8: Rising use of family planning.....	21
Figure 9: Unintended pregnancy rates per 1,000 women between 15 and 44 years of age, by geographical area and time period.....	22
Figure 10: Impact of adding new contraceptive methods on the number of users, selected countries, 1965–1973.....	23
Figure 11: Declining maternal mortality.....	26
Figure 12: Mortality rates for reproductive health cancers (age standardized), 1994–2016.....	28
Figure 13: Human mobility.....	33
Figure 14: Displacement is on the rise.....	35
Figure 15: Fertility and per capita emissions.....	39

FOREWORD

"Since 1994, maternal death has declined by around 40 per cent. Rates of child marriage and female genital mutilation have fallen. Primary school is accessible to most children in the world, and human life expectancy has increased by seven years since 1994. Yet the successes we have seen are not sufficient. Millions of people are still waiting for the promise of the International Conference on Population and Development: the more than 10 million girls who will be married under the age of 18 in 2019, the nearly 4 million girls who will undergo female genital mutilation this year, the 60 per cent of young people in Africa who will not access secondary school, the more than 200 million women and adolescent girls waiting for modern contraception."

Dr. Natalia Kanem
Executive Director, UNFPA

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994 represents a landmark in the history of population and development issues, as the Programme of Action adopted at the end of the Conference exhibited an exceptional consensus among 179 governments that people's rights should be at the heart of development. Although the Conference recognized that the implementation of the Programme of Action was the sovereign right of each country, consistent with its national laws and development priorities, it affirmed sexual and reproductive health as a fundamental human right and emphasized that empowering women and girls is key to ensuring the well-being of individuals, families, nations and our world.

This acknowledgment that people's rights, choices and well-being are the path to sustainable development was a paradigm shift in global thinking on population and development issues. It heralded the way from a focus on reaching specific demographic targets to a focus on the needs, aspirations and rights of individual women and men. The Programme of Action asserted that everyone counts, that the true focus of development policy must be the improvement of individual lives and the measure of progress should be the extent to which we address inequalities.

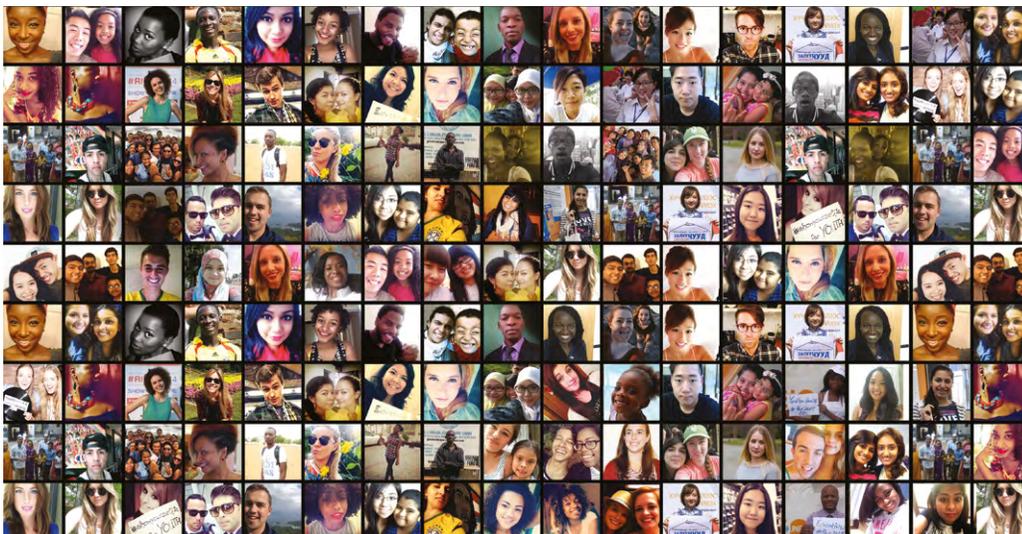
The scope of the Programme of Action provided a foundation for the Sustainable Development Goals. Since its adoption, the world has seen significant improvements in poverty reduction—with an estimated one billion people moving out of extreme poverty—, substantially improved health systems and increases in life expectancy, and significant investments in access to primary education for both boys and girls. In addition, girls and adolescents today are less likely to experience harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation.

These development gains have not, however, reached everyone and significant gaps and inequalities remain.

Greater efforts are needed to tackle today's challenges and ensure that the promises of Cairo are fulfilled. Today, the world faces new challenges and opportunities related to rise in inequality, changing population dynamics and age structures, rapid urbanization and migration, and climate change. More than in 1994, national demographics are presently more diverse, as wealthy countries of Europe, Asia and the Americas face rapid population ageing, while Africa and some countries in Asia prepare for the largest cohort of young people the world has ever seen, and the 49 poorest countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, continue to face premature mortality and high fertility.

The present report celebrates the progress made and highlights the gaps in the achievement of the Cairo vision. It stresses key areas of synergy and provides recommendations aimed at addressing the gaps, the fulfillment of which requires greater innovation, better leadership, and more investment in the capabilities and creativity of the world's young people. International cooperation and universal solidarity are also crucial in order to leave no one behind.

Benoit Kalasa
Director, Technical Division, UNFPA



SUMMARY

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, adopted in 1994 by 179 governments, represented a paradigm shift for population and development in the recognition that people's rights, choices and well-being are the path to sustainable development. Twenty-five years of evidence and practice continue to support this consensus and to affirm the critical importance of considering prevailing population dynamics in the development policies of a given country.

The scope of the ICPD Programme of Action emphasized sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and promoted a vision of integrated development that foreshadowed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Its principles underpin the Sustainable Development Goals, including the need for non-discrimination and universality in both opportunities and outcomes; the centrality of health, education and women's empowerment to sustainable development; and the collective need to ensure environmental sustainability. The emphasis in the 2030 Agenda on leaving no one behind builds on the recognition that people live with multiple, simultaneous and compound inequalities, many of which are mutually reinforcing.

The present report, marking 25 years since the Conference held in Cairo, celebrates progress and identifies shortfalls in the implementation of the Programme of Action since 1994. It draws on the 2018 regional reviews of the Conference, which recognized the relevance and contribution of the ICPD agenda to advancing sustainable development in all regions. It highlights key areas of synergy between the fulfilment of the Programme of Action and the achievement of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals and offers recommendations for delivering the promise of the Conference to all in order to accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda.

INTRODUCTION

When delegates convened at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, concerns over population growth had underpinned development aid for more than two decades. The global population had grown from 3.7 billion in 1970 to 5.3 billion in 1990, and leaders feared that population growth would outpace development. Family planning was a priority of development, and the adoption of modern contraception worldwide had increased from 36 per cent in 1970 to 55 per cent in 1994.

Civil society, in particular the women's health movement, brought to the Conference widespread concerns over the quality of care within family planning programmes¹, in particular in the context of high maternal and infant mortality², untreated reproductive morbidities³, and social and legal norms that remained highly discriminatory to women. The resulting Programme of Action⁴, adopted by 179 Governments, represented a paradigm shift for population and development, moving from a focus on reaching population targets to a focus on the needs, aspirations and reproductive rights of women and men. Delegates affirmed that demand for smaller families was widespread and increasing, but the adoption of family planning was highest where services were of high quality and provided within a context of women's social and economic empowerment, reproductive health and better infant and child health.

Within two years, the first Guidelines on the Medical Eligibility for Contraceptive Use were published⁵, improving quality standards: family planning was

that women's education and empowerment improved their own and their family's health and increased the adoption of family planning⁷.

The scope of the 1994 Programme of Action extended beyond reproductive health and rights, promoting a vision of integrated development that foreshadowed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There was an emphasis on principles that underpin the Sustainable Development Goals, including the need for non-discrimination and universality in both opportunities and outcomes (Goals 1 and 10); the centrality of health, education and women's empowerment to sustainable development (Goals 3,4 and 5); and the collective need to assure environmental sustainability (Goals 7,12 and 13). These principles also underpin the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, and the New Urban Agenda, among other recent development paradigms.

The importance of aligning development with human rights was also emphasized at the Conference, given that aggregate achievements are made possible through the expansion of individual human freedoms, choices and capabilities. There was an emphasis on the importance of each country aligning development targets with its prevailing population dynamics, including age distribution(s), population momentum, patterns of human mobility, and the geographic clustering of people. Such guidance remains essential to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The past 25 years of programming and research have found the premises of the Conference to be sound

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