

FROM NUMBERS TO QUALITY OF LIFE



1. A revolution took place in the Cairo Conference. People - with their lives, feelings, needs, aspirations, hopes - took back their place at the center of the population-development equation. No science, no technology, no State policy, no development agency program can replace their right and capacity to decide their own destiny.

2. In the years preceeding the Conference, uneasiness had already been felt about the approaches followed in many "population programs". Important as demography is in providing warning signals about the growth, composition and movement of populations, it was not enough to design integrated policies. By not taking into account other interrelated aspects of the quality of life of people, it could even lead to a distorsion of the more encompassing goals of development. This could be clearly seen in many situations where the agents of "population programs" and the agents of "development projects" run parallel courses.

3. Moreover the well-elaborated and balanced decisions of previous Population Conferences, specially the Bucharest Program of Action, were far from being fully implemented.

4. In the Public Hearings conducted by the ICPQL in South Asia and in Latin America, the voices were loud and clear about the "social cost" of one-sided, not-integrated "population

programs". Their analysis was sharp: "looking at the population situation as a problem of numbers has seriously damaged the quality of life of people living in the countries where the population control programs are promoted". Their advice was even stronger: "the obsession with numbers, percentages, ratios, has to be given up if people themselves have to come first". Women felt stronger than anybody else the consequences of the quantitative, non-participative, and therefore alien programs. In the words of a Bangladesh young woman: "Womwn have children, they don't have population!"

5. New concepts and new approaches were needed. A more integrated formulation of the population problem was asked for. Both "altenative policy framework"¹ and "reinvigorating analysis of the relationship population-development"² had become obvious cornerstones of efficient population policies. What was at stake was more the reinforcement of existing "population activities". It was a redefinition of the population problem, a redefinition which would take into account the many dimensions of the problem.



¹ T.K.Sundry Ravindran, "Women and the politics of population and development in India", in "Reproductive Health Matters", n.1, 1993, pg.26-38

² Paul Demeny, "Population and development", IUSSP Distinguished Lecture Series, 1994

6. It is clear that the irreducible complexity of human life cannot be encapsulated by any particular science and, even less, can it be answered to by vertical policies, unaware of the interwoven patterns of human needs and desires.

7. The Cairo Conference has contributed decisively to this redefinition.

8. Most of all because it resituated the global population question as a dynamic challenge to the world community. And it did so, not as a prolongation of malthusian concerns of the past but as a courageous commitment to the future. Indeed, unable as we appear to be in sharing resources and organizing our institutions so as to include the 1.3 billion human beings who live under total destitution, how are we going to welcome in the next 30 years the 3 billion who will be brought into life by the generations in the reproductive age?

10. An important breakthrough took place in Cairo. The central place acknowledged to women at all levels of the population question became more than a new step in ending discrimination against women. Even more than a reaffirmation of their rights. It stands now as an imperative to reshuffle public policies and to re-orientate political goals at the national and international level.

13. By giving priority to the autonomy of women's decision-making in the chain of human reproduction, the international community



has pledged its political will into a definite direction. It has committed itself to the public policies capable to support a coherent population policy. This is particularly evident in the decisionst concerning the establishment of social policies and in the lucidity with which the allocation of resources have been dealt with.



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9. It is clear that these tremendous responsibilities cannot be coped with within the scope of the same assumptions used in the past. A major shift is necessary.

11. First of all a definite and unsurmountable link between population and development has been firmly established. Of course, the linkages between the population factors and the different components of development and environment had been amply documented in the past twenty years. Population exhausts environmental resources, depletion of environment undermines development, scarcity of resources induces greater poverty and with it the cycle to more population growth.

But the Cairo Conference has shown that any "population programs" unaware of such linkages are deemed to failure. An experience-based consensus about those undeniable linkages was thus brought strongly into focus.

14. This acknowledged interplay of population and development can be seen even in the flagrant fact that the newly industrialized countries of Asia have reached in less than 25 years the population stabilization that took more than a hundred years for Europe to reach. But the question is not only, not even first of all a question of economic growth. It is a question of sustainable development where the social policies take a proeminent role.





14. The Cairo Conference didn't fail to give a decisive place to the social policies that are known to be of a direct relation with the population question. With the idea that social rights are merely indicative and not of an immediate responsibility of the public policies, most Governments are often not consistent in the definition and implementation of social policies. At the most, social policies are estimated to be corrective of the shortcomings of the economy in periods of crisis. Seldom are they considered to be pivotal to governments' programs. Moreover, the current changes undergone by the welfare state as well as the complete erasing of the social policies in the former Communist countries seem to put again social policies at the mercy of the economy.

In such a context it is even more important to reaffirm that in what concerns, among others, population policies, there is no short-cut: social policies have to become the hard core of political action. Healthy and educated human beings will be able to make enlightened choices in all realms of their lives and to shape their own society .

15. The political meaning of the social policies as expression of the interdependence between population and development goes beyond practical goals. Their right place in the political decision-making process is a guarantee of a democracy adapted to our time. They are the sign by which a democracy shows that it has the power to regulate the market and to put it at the service of the collective well-being.

16. Women's education is known to be a decisive step in women's capacity to determine their own reproductive life. It is true that many decades of development effort didn't erase yet the puzzling fact that less than 50% of women in the LDCs and south of Sahara have no school education at all. The awareness of the acute consequences of a high fertility rate provide more than a pretext to move forcefully in the direction of innovative, multimedia ways of providing women everywhere with basic education. It is a turning point in the practical affirmation of women's human rights.

17. Reproductive rights are part of a panoply of fundamental human rights and guarantees, namely, the right of inviolability of the human body, the right to the protection of the family and the right to health care. Reproductive rights are indivisible from the right to reproductive health which is nothing but a part of the right of primary health care. Again, the full exercise of reproductive rights in good human conditions provides an opportunity to refocus health public policies.

18. Indeed, how is it possible to launch family planning programmes respectful of women's quality of life when we see the figures of utter destitution? How to introduce efficient new technologies asking for medical supervision in countries (like all the countries south of Sahara) where there is one medical doctor for 36,000 inhabitants? Where sanitary facilities are nonexistent and there is no access to water? How to abilitate



women with their reproductive rights when their scholarization still reaches less than 20% in countries like Mali?

19. Besides the already acknowledged role of health and education other social policies should be looked into - housing, urbanisation, transportation, energy, each in its own way is a decisive factor in the determination of a balanced population dynamics and in the shaping of the quality of life of the population. But as we are still far from interpreting the interactions among all these factors we still fail to draw up the exact policies which are so strongly needed.



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