

ICPD Beyond 2014 Issue Brief: Sustainable Development

As the world constructs a new agenda for global development, the ICPD Beyond 2014 Review, which falls between Rio+20 and the design of Sustainable Development Goals, articulates the continued relevance and unfulfilled implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action (POA) within the context of a new development environment that is shaped by, and must respond to, a need to reconcile rising levels of consumption, threats to the environment, and growing wealth and income inequality. At this challenging threshold, the core message of the ICPD – **that a fundamental commitment to individual dignity and human rights is the basis of a resilient and sustainable future** – defines a set of pathways that are needed to address this quandary and to achieve sustainable development for all.

Prioritizing Social Dimensions of Sustainability

Government responses to the ICPD Beyond 2014 Global Survey suggest widespread acknowledgement that social and environmental sustainability must be at the core of inclusive development, and that economic growth is the means for, rather than the measure of, social well-being. When asked to identify the population and sustainable development issues anticipated to receive public policy priority for the next five to ten years, the most frequently listed issue was “social sustainability, poverty reduction and rights”, a priority among 70 per cent of governments. This was followed by “environmental sustainability” for 52 per cent, and 25 per cent listed “economic growth” as a priority. The results of the ICPD Beyond 2014 review provide a framework to ensure the social dimensions of sustainable development.

A Framework for ICPD Beyond 2014

The ICPD Review re-affirms the core message of the POA and proposes a framework of action that organizes the wide array of issues it covered into five thematic pillars to ensure a systematic, comprehensive and integrated approach beyond 2014: the equitable realization of **dignity and human rights, health**, and security of **place and mobility**, achieved through good **governance** and systems of accountability, as foundations of **sustainability**. These thematic pillars call attention to critical pathways to sustainability that ICPD can contribute to the Post-2015 agenda.

1. The primary attention to DIGNITY AND

HUMAN RIGHTS underscores that completing the unfinished agenda of the ICPD will require a focused and shared commitment to human rights, to non-discrimination, and to expanding opportunity for all persons, including eradicating extreme poverty, addressing inequalities, including gender inequality, and ensuring social inclusiveness.

The economic and social benefits of the current development model have not been equally distributed: even as 700 million people were lifted out of poverty from 1990 to 2010, many others have seen their income levels and living standards stagnate or worsen, and the top five per cent of earners have garnered over half of global income gains over this period.

High inequality is a threat to social cohesion, political participation, population health, class mobility and sustained economic growth. The diversion of the Earth’s finite natural resources to a small part of the population limits the resource base for poverty reduction and sustainable growth. **Eliminating extreme poverty and reducing inequality are defining components of sustainable development.**

Realizing dignity and human rights is a precondition for improving the well-being and opportunity of all individuals, irrespective of gender, age, ethnicity, race, disability, migratory status, HIV status, sexual orientation or any other status, for freeing them from the threat of violence, and for empowering them to achieve their full potential and contribute to

development. **Sustainable development should be based on the recognized universality of dignity and human rights for all persons**, in present and future generations.

2. The right to the highest attainable standard of **HEALTH**, the significance of good health to the enjoyment of dignity and human rights, and the importance of healthy populations for all aspects of development are undeniable.

Sustainable development includes investing in lifelong health and education, especially for young people. Good health and quality education throughout the life course, including comprehensive sexuality education, provide especially high returns for societies. A focus on adolescents and youth is particularly necessary, as the largest cohort of young people in human history is about to enter their productive and reproductive years. Their success will define the development trajectories for not only sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia, where they are a high proportion of the population, but for the entire world, given increasingly interconnected and globalized economies.

The ICPD recognized the centrality of **universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights** to health and development. If women and young people are to contribute to growth, innovation and development, then they must have the opportunity to stay healthy and decide on the number and timing of their children, and to do so free from violence or coercion, with full confidence that pregnancy and childbirth can be entered into without grave fear of illness, disability or death. The achievement of universal access to quality sexual and reproductive health and rights for all demands urgent renewed investments directed towards holistically strengthening health systems. Structural inequalities and other barriers to accessing services, including those due to stigma and discrimination, must be addressed.

3. PLACE AND MOBILITY encompasses the social and spatial environment that we live in

and move between. The importance of place and mobility as a thematic pillar is in linking the large-scale trends and dynamics of population – household formation and composition, internal mobility and urbanization, international migration, and access to land and displacement – to the achievement of both individual dignity and well-being and sustainable development.

Security of place and mobility is fundamental to sustainability. Migration is an intrinsic and essential feature of a globalizing world. The international community should make migration work for development, and all persons, whether internal or international migrants, homeless persons, internally displaced persons or refugees, should be provided with access to education, health care and social protection, their safety and security ensured and their social integration fostered.

Urbanization is the most important trend in mobility worldwide, with over half the population now living in urban areas and projections suggesting over two-thirds by 2050. **Planning for urbanization and building sustainable cities** should be a priority focus for countries undergoing the urban transition. Cities that are accepting of population growth, are connected to rural areas around them, and deliver for the poor are a key part of sustainable development, including for rural areas.

4. GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY is the primary means of achieving these goals. As the world generates goals for the future, progress in participation is at the core, along with generation and use of data and knowledge, integration of population dynamics in development planning, continued expansion of global and national human rights accountability systems, cooperation and adequate resources.

There is a **critical and continuing need for global leadership to achieve sustainability.** Political will, wide civil society participation and data to monitor sustainable development commitments at vital parts of the emerging development

agenda. The revolution in information technology provides the potential to bring this information to people around the world, including young people and the marginalized, to create a foundation for broader knowledge, transparency and inclusion.

5. Finally, **SUSTAINABILITY** addresses the linkages between diverse population dynamics, the environment, individual well-being, inequality and human rights.

There were an estimated 5.7 billion people in the world at the time of the ICPD in 1994. Global population has now reached 7.1 billion, and continues to grow by some 82 million people per year. Yet **global population trends mask considerable and growing diversity of demographic experiences around the world.** Declining fertility and mortality, together with urbanization, have caused unprecedented changes in age structures and spatial distribution. This diversity means that the link between population dynamics and sustainability is context specific and dependent on many other aspects of development paths countries experience. Too often, population dynamics, especially population size and growth, are seen as undifferentiated and global.

When considering the link between population growth and environment, **the error that is habitually made is to identify larger populations with greater environmental impact – that is to equate one person with one unit of consumption.** With regard to climate change, only 2.5 billion people could be minimally considered as having consumption profiles that contribute to emissions. Countries with lower fertility generally display higher levels of consumption, while higher fertility countries tend to have high poverty and very low levels of consumption. Poor countries and their populations have the right to development and to improve their living standards, which requires higher economic growth. Under this scenario, their consumption profiles will and should increase; unless this increase happens in a

radically different manner than has been the case for wealthier countries, it will further climate change. Yet fertility declines will be associated with higher per capita household income and thus with greater capacity to consume. Consequently, **emissions reductions associated with declining population growth are highly dependent on the extent and nature of consumption and economic growth.**

Technology and innovation for sustainable consumption and production are critical for reconciling economic growth, well-being and environmental resources. In addition, **a fundamental change to patterns of consumption** is required to slow down the frenetic waste of natural resources, to refocus development aspirations on realizing dignity for all and to enrich prospects for human dignity for future generations. The base contributions to consumption – modes of transport, housing options, utilities – are significantly determined by the organization and public infrastructure of the societies in which we live. **Investment in and maintenance of universal, cost-efficient, public infrastructure and services** is one of the most established, effective and just means of change that governments can undertake to introduce efficiencies and ensure that physical, social and economic opportunities are equally accessible and beneficial to all.

From ICPD Beyond 2014 to Post-2015

As the debates and policies on population before the 1994 ICPD demonstrate, large-scale global fears have too often been prioritized over the human rights and freedoms of individuals and communities, and at worst have been used to *justify* constraints on human rights. Debates over environmental sustainability, and about stimulating economic growth following the crisis of 2008, risk the same consequences. The findings of the ICPD Beyond 2014 Review show a path to collective sustainability that ensures the continuity of ICPD's paradigm shift in placing **dignity and rights at the heart of sustainable development.**