

As written

**International Forum
for the Operational Review and Appraisal
of the Implementation of the Programme of Action
of the International Conference on Population and Development
(The Hague, The Netherlands, 8-12 February 1999)**

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On behalf of the Administrator of UNDP, Mr. James Gustave Speth, I would like to congratulate Dr. Nafis Sadik and UNFPA for having taken the initiative of convening this international forum, and to thank the Government of the Netherlands for its strong support and generous hospitality.

The world conferences of the 1990s have helped transform the way we see development. They have directed attention firmly towards the needs of people; they have established an overall priority, the eradication of poverty, and they have set forth four key principles: sustainability, empowerment, participation and equality, that cut across the political, social, economic and environmental dimensions of people-centred development.

Many speakers at this Forum have already emphasised the special contribution that the Cairo Conference and Programme of Action made to this overall outcome by shifting the approach to population and development from numbers to rights or, to borrow the phrase of the Chairperson of IPPF, from demographics to democracy. There is no doubt that the ICPD played a decisive role in placing the need and urgency of gender equality and of a rights-based approach to the advancement of women at the core of the new paradigm, and that it did so thanks to no small extent to a strong sense of shared responsibility between governments and organizations of the civil society.

The review processes that have been undertaken by the General Assembly since 1997 provide the international community with an opportunity to measure the progress made against the outcomes of each and every one of the major conferences, to learn from and replicate good and successful practices, and to recommend strategic action to address major existing constraints as well as new and emerging challenges.

The comprehensive background paper prepared by UNFPA for this forum underscores the progress that has been achieved since 1994, especially as regards the promotion of reproductive health and reproductive rights through policy, legislative and institutional transformation, greater integration of reproductive health in the broader health policies and programmes in countries where comprehensive reforms have been taking place, and increased resource allocations in a number of developing countries. On the other hand, the slowness and striking unevenness of progress across regions, the setbacks that are occurring in certain parts of the world, the ongoing difficulties faced in most regions in key areas of gender equality and empowerment, as well as the continuing overall decline in resources for development cooperation, are all cause for concern and will undoubtedly be at the centre of discussions throughout this review process.

It is indeed a cruel irony that at a time when the international community, and an increasing number of individual countries, are committed to the goal of eradicating absolute poverty and reducing substantially overall poverty, world poverty should be increasing due to the cumulative impact of recent or new crises which affect several of the world's regions.

The long-term social impact of the economic crisis in south-east Asia, the poverty that devastates Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and the overall consequences of HIV/AIDS on the development capabilities and potential of many countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, are emblematic of the enormous asymmetry that exists between the long-term transformational agenda to which countries must commit themselves to reduce human poverty sustainably, on the one hand, and the sudden reversibility of the progress made in this struggle, on the other.

In spite of the hopes raised by the economic recovery of the 1990s, the slowing down of global growth, the quasi-simultaneous eruption of new crises, the rise of income inequality on a global scale, the continued crippling of a majority of the poorest countries by their debt overhang, and the unprecedented low levels of aggregate ODA, all conjure to turn the 1990s into another 'lost decade' for the world's poor, especially the most vulnerable among them, i.e. women and children.

Yet, there is no alternative, for a world that aspires to live in peace, to improving our collective caring capacity through the long-term vision of promoting human development and overcoming human poverty. And there is no alternative, if we want to improve human capabilities and opportunities, to the promotion of gender equality through the affirmation of women's rights, universal access for women to basic social services, including reproductive health services, and economic and political empowerment of women. For gender inequality is almost universally recognized now as perhaps the single most important factor in the perpetuation of poverty both within and across generations, a perpetuation that begins even before birth when malnourished women are more likely to give birth to low-weight children and when poorly educated women are less able to promote the health and education of their children.

In the face of this imperative and also of the crises that threaten the lives of more and more people, the time seems to have come to call for an effective system of protection of human security against all adversities. Sudden oscillations in GDP should not be allowed to affect the absolute amount of resources allocated to poverty eradication from National Income. Along with universal coverage of basic parameters of human development, such as health and education, there should exist an absolute (as opposed to percentage or relative) determination of the public expenditures earmarked for poverty reduction. In the event of a drastic decline in the national income, that allocation would provide a safety net whose main beneficiaries, as we know all too well from all past and present experiences, are women and children.

Within the UN system, UNDP is fully dedicated to the elimination of human poverty. The 1997 *Human Development Report* proposed an agenda for poverty reduction which emphasized the self-empowerment of the poor, pro-poor growth, gender equality, pro-poor governance and partnerships between governments and civil society as key points for sustained action. Last October, in another report, *Overcoming Human Poverty*, UNDP provided a first fairly comprehensive picture of the priority actions that it is supporting in developing and transition countries, in particular through the promotion of better-integrated national strategies for poverty reduction that make it possible to link the various levels at which poverty needs to be addressed: macro-policy, access to key assets for the poor, institutional reform, and action at the community level.

While not itself primarily a provider of basic social services (although just over one-sixth of its current portfolio of projects funded by core resources is dedicated to such services), UNDP is strongly committed to helping countries promote the policies, institutions and programmes that can mobilize and use optimally the resources needed to fill the huge gaps in funding and provide universal access. Together with UNICEF, UNFPA, UNESCO and WHO, UNDP has been involved since the beginning in the promotion of the 20/20 approach. In collaboration with UNICEF, it is supporting the implementation of 20/20 in some 30 countries, helping them with social sector expenditure reviews. As reviews show, while some countries have scope for moving funds into the social sector, public expenditure is tightly constrained in many others, especially those that are heavily indebted. There is a great need for more resources to be committed to social services and for these to be used more efficiently and equitably. Too often, the beneficiaries of government social spending are the non-poor, so that government spending serves to perpetuate or intensify inequality. UNDP has emphasized that in addition to overhauling the composition of expenditures, the impact of the services matter. It is also possible for governments to have provided basic social services that the poor are not utilizing. This can be the case with primary schools, for instance, when the children of poor families, and primarily girls, cannot use existing facilities due to the direct and indirect expenses involved. The combination of sluggish growth, fiscal tightening and heavy debt burdens has

in many countries led to deep cuts in social sector spending and to the introduction of cost-recovery schemes which penalize the poor who find them simply unaffordable.

Three other roles played by UNDP are worth emphasizing at this forum.

Firstly, UNDP uses its human poverty perspective to give a more comprehensive answer to question 'are women poorer than men?'. So far, most analyses of the 'feminisation' of poverty have concluded that compared to men, women have a higher incidence of poverty, that their poverty is more severe than that of men, and that the incidence of poverty among women is increasing. But these conclusions have traditionally led to policies that focus on income generation and immediate practical needs, rather than longer-term issues of equality and empowerment which need to be addressed from the household upwards, such as women's subordination in labour markets and violence against women. Increasingly UNDP uses participatory methods of inquiry and social mobilisation to design programmes that address human poverty on women's terms. UNDP is also helping make macro-economic policy more responsive to women's needs, for instance by re-directing public expenditure to meet the interests of poor women and promoting gender-aware planning and policy making.

Secondly, though its support for and management of the Resident Coordinator system, UNDP is fully committed to the reform of United Nations operational activities and to its centrepiece, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), which offers much potential for the translation of global conference agenda and UN agency mandates into better-integrated country-level action plans. The Common Country Assessment (CCA), which is designed to help identify areas for priority attention, has provided an unprecedented opportunity to discuss and agree a common set of core indicators for the pursuit of people-centered sustainable development. UNFPA has provided valuable leadership in the working group on baseline indicators.

Thirdly, UNDP has central responsibility in the multilateral system for aid coordination and is keen to work with its UN system partners, including the World Bank, and with others, including the Development Assistance Committee, to improve existing mechanisms in order to 'make aid work for the poor'. While poverty reduction is and will remain the responsibility of each government and country, reaching the goals agreed upon at Cairo and other world conferences requires a global partnership in which the efforts of developing and transition countries can be supported on a sustained and consistent manner. Aid must be refocused on the needs of poorest countries and poorest people. Higher levels of support for basic social services will make an important difference and are urgently required. Multi-donor support for cross-sectoral poverty-reduction strategies needs to be encouraged. And more must be done to integrate donor support to state and non-state actors so as to generate greater total commitment, capacities and resources to the common cause of poverty and inequality reduction.

To close on a very positive note, I would like to applaud UNFPA's untiring efforts to develop collaborative efforts with organizations of the civil society for the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. A pioneer in the UN system of the concept and practice of cooperation with NGOs, UNFPA knows better than most that working with civil society requires more than operational collaboration, important though this may be. CSO involvement in policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and assessment is critical, and the good news is that it is a growing reality in country-level ICPD implementation. Strengthening the capacity of CSOs to become more involved in policy analysis, development and implementation is a common agenda for the UN system. I would like to congratulate UNFPA for having encouraged the organization of the various fora that took place over the weekend and to thank their participants for the quality and depth of their contributions to this review.