

As WRITTEN



TWENTY-FIRST SPECIAL SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

*Five-year review
of the progress made towards the implementation of the
ICPD Programme of Action*

Intervention by

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Mr Chairman Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Five years after Cairo, all the actors at the international and national level understand that the real challenges facing our world today are interrelated as well as universal but that, principally, everyone needs to assume concrete responsibilities and contribute to the creation of a real sustainable future. Today, when we think of population, we immediately include priority issues such as human rights, needs, choices, endogenous capacity-building, equity-equality and the empowerment of women. Sustainable development puts humanity and its needs at the centre of its concern and also emphasizes establishing balances rather than imposing limitations. It is in this context that it is important to recall, at this important Special Session of the UN General Assembly, the message presented to Cairo by the Director-General of UNESCO, Dr Federico Mayor, which is still valid today:

“The regulation of population growth is undoubtedly one of the major and most pressing challenges facing the human community at the present time. But it is only one factor in a complex equation that can spell the difference between greater prosperity for all in a more equitable world or increased poverty, environmental degradation and politico-social tensions of all kinds. Population policies must therefore form part of an integrated sustainable human development strategy that includes protection of the environment, the promotion of economic well-being and the furthering of social progress, including enhancement of the status of women”.

To be effective, such a strategy must be radical, in the sense of going to the root of our problems.

2. The ICPD Programme of Action emphasizes the importance of achieving “universal access to quality education, with particular priority being given to primary and secondary technical education and job training; to combat illiteracy and to eliminate gender disparities in access to, retention in and support for education”. These goals remain far from being achieved. In 1995, in Amman, during the review of progress towards the goals set at the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990) it was noted that advances had been made in many countries, especially in expanding primary school enrolments. But progress in closing the gender gap – a factor of critical importance in accelerating the demographic transition – was termed ‘excruciatingly slow’. The expanded vision of basic education espoused in Jomtien has often been reduced to the simple emphasis of putting more children into school – essential but only one of many measures needed to achieve education for all.

3. In September 1997, the second E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting in Islamabad, Pakistan agreed that - and I quote - **“education can be neither relevant nor complete without addressing population issues, and we resolve to take into account the linkages between education, population and development, as endorsed by all countries at the ICPD in 1994, in all future Review Meetings, country reports and other relevant E9 activities. Our common goal of Education for AU requires an integrated, multi-sectoral approach”**. They also committed themselves to pay special attention to several key areas like street and working children and the education of girls and women. Today we are in the process of preparing for “The Year 2000 Assessment” of the ten years’ movement of ‘EFA’ (Senegal, 2000).

4. The school experience of many children in the developing world is relatively brief and unsatisfactory. Only 66 per cent of primary school-age girls and 72 per cent of boys pursue their studies as far as grade five. Indeed, many students drop out between the first and second grade, having **acquired** not even the most basic elements of an education. High repetition rates also slow the **progress** and increase the cost of education in developing countries. This disappointing record no doubt reflects both the poverty of the children concerned and the inability of the school to respond adequately to their needs. *

5. The education of women has a particularly important impact on maternal and child mortality and morbidity. Education is among the most effective means of eroding traditional attitudes and creating more egalitarian values. **Education** influences the number of children parents desire, the measures they take to achieve the objective they set themselves and the manner in which they care for and protect the children they have. Education plays a critical and multifaceted role in development. This is why UNESCO's first educational priority for the last five years has been the promotion of access for all to every level of education, and the improvement of the quality and relevance of education.

UNESCO has intensified its efforts to help women enjoy equal access with men to education, training and research, to be empowered to participate fully in the economic, political and cultural life of the community. "Women" became a priority group for all of the Organization's activities and a special Unit for the promotion of the status of women and gender equality was created.

6. UNESCO's contribution to this fifth anniversary of the ICPD is a monograph entitled '**Education and Population Dynamics: Mobilizing Minds for a Sustainable Future**' which advocates population policies and education programmes that are part of an integrated strategy for sustainable human development. This document describes the multiple interactions between population **dynamics and education and suggests, *inter alia***, how education – in its broadest sense – can help build awareness of the issues involved and play a determining role in accelerating both development and the demographic transition already underway in many countries. Having summarized some of the more notable research findings of recent years, it calls on the international community to mobilize the resources, talent and will needed to shape a **future** in which every person may live a **peaceful** and productive life.

7. Population education programmes provide a setting for developing and testing methods and materials, responding to youth and adolescent needs in reproductive

* The **demographic challenge** to education. The demographic **pressure** placed on educational systems is evident in the growth of primary school enrolments during the past decades. During the 25-year period 1970-95, for example, total world enrolment at the primary level increased from 3% million to 650 million. This growth was confined exclusively to the developing regions of the world in which enrolment increased from 305 million in 1970 to 561 million in 1995. Even this rapid growth in enrolment, however, could not **provide** every primary school-age child with a place in school. The number of out-of-school children increased from an estimated 90 million in 1985 to 110 million in 1990, &fore declining to about 83 million in 1995. Fifty million of these children are girls. Indeed, when the least developed countries are considered alone, the number of out-of-school girls of primary-school age is seen to have increased from an estimated 14 million in 1985 to 19 million in 1995.

health. In this context UNESCO is promoting preventive education as one of the best means of combating HIV/AIDS and drug abuse.

8. During the last five years UNESCO has been working for a properly managed relationship between population and social challenges, population resources, the environment and development, and enhancing the full participation of all relevant groups, especially women and youth.

9. In this context UNESCO has produced a second document especially for this Session entitled “*UNESCO’s Main Achievements*”, which presents an operational review of initiatives and activities undertaken and/or supported by UNESCO for the period 1995-1999, which fall within the critical areas covered by the Programme of Action (POA) of the ICPD. UNESCO’s contribution to the objectives set out in the POA is in line with the objectives of its Medium-Term Strategy, 1996-2000. This Strategy provides a baseline for the follow-up to the ICPD, and also a co-ordinated follow-up to the other UN major conferences, as they relate to population and development-related issues. In these areas, UNESCO is aware that its actions can only complement the efforts made by Member States, the UN system and NGOs in trying to solve, or at least to reduce, the problems inherent in the interrelationship between population and development.

10. During these last five years UNESCO has promoted important international activities on education. For example, in 1996, the **International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century** presented its ‘Delors’ report “*Learning: The Treasure Within*”, which gave rise to a great deal of reflection and debate on education throughout the international community, and **The World Commission on Culture and Development**, under the Chairmanship of Mr Javier Perez de Cuéllar, also presented its report entitled “*Our Creative Diversity*”. In 1997 The **Fifth International Conference on Adult Education** led to a re-appraisal of the scope and importance of adult education, and identified areas for priority action, while during the 29th Session of UNESCO’s General Conference, a **Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations Towards Future Generations was adopted, with Article 2** advocating Freedom of choice. (This Declaration has been reproduced as an annex to UNESCO’s Main Achievements document.) In 1998, the **World Conference on Higher Education** in Paris gave priority place to the discussion on teaching, research and teacher training on sustainable development and population challenges.

11. Mr Chairman, UNESCO’s specific mandate in the area of population includes, among other aspects, research, information, education and communication (IEC) activities aimed at encouraging attitudes in the promotion of responsible behaviour in population and development, especially in the areas such as sexuality, reproduction, gender, family and environment. During the last five years UNESCO promoted concrete activities in the area of

strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedom; rejecting discrimination and promoting human rights and equity; protecting the right of everyone to enjoy physical and mental health, and responding to youth and adolescent needs in reproductive health; research and proper management of social transformations related to internal migration and urbanization, as well as international migration; working for a properly managed relationship between

population, resources, the environment and development and enhancing the full participation of all relevant groups, especially women and youth.

12. During this period UNESCO, in co-operation with UNFPA, published the **“People on Earth World Population Map”** and its accompanying booklet. The population distribution map gives a fairly accurate idea of human presence on the Earth’s **surface**. The map and booklet – an excellent working tool for research in the field of population, environment and development - is also addressed to **decision-makers**, planners, researchers and educators. Today we are in the process of preparing regional maps with their accompanying manuals oriented at all levels of formal education.

13. UNESCO **will** continue to participate actively in the inter-agency mechanisms set up for the integrated follow-up to the major United Nations conferences, particularly the ICPD Programme of Action and to play a catalytic role in mobilizing the support of all the relevant organizations of the UN System and **NGOs** in favour of **educating** for a sustainable future. UNESCO also wishes to emphasize the very important role played by UNFPA generally during the last five years and particularly the achievements made by the **CST/TSS** System. We would also like to congratulate the important work of the UN Population Division.

14. Finally, Mr Chairman, five years after Cairo we are convinced that the ultimate aim is to change peoples’ attitudes and behaviour through collective life-learning processes, partnerships, equity, opportunities and options, equal participation, continuous dialogue in the context of strong democratic societies and the creation of synergies at all levels.

15. In UNESCO we believe also that today we are living a “quiet revolution” related to the demographic transition: from high rates of fertility and **mortality** to low rates, this transition has altered the human existence on this planet. But there are still important challenges today as, for example, adolescent reproductive behaviour, the **HIV/AIDS** epidemic, migration and migrant **trafficking, refugees** etc., that force us to continue and redouble our efforts, always with the universal and local vision, but also with a transdisciplinary one.

16. UNESCO continues to be **fully committed** in every way to the **further** implementation of the **ICPD** Programme of Action we would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Preparatory Committee on the recommendations for consideration and adoption by this Special Assembly, in which great emphasis and force has been placed on the role of education. We look forward to the continued commitment by all governments to achieving the goals and objectives set out in the ICPD Programme of Action.

Thank you.