
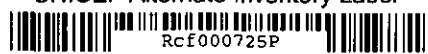


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Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
at the
International Conference on Population and Development

Cairo, Egypt
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Since the conference on population in Mexico City in 1984, it has become increasingly clear that development must be responsive to a new paradigm. If it is to be sustainable today, development must not only produce economic growth, sustainable in the environmental sense. It also must be sustainable in a human sense -- it must break the grip of poverty on the bottom half or third of society and slow population growth, while sustaining democracy, human rights, people's participation in the development process and peace.

This conference can reap the fruits of two decades of deepening understanding of population growth and its determinants by embracing the "total approach" that is reflected in the draft Programme of Action. This approach recognizes that the only hope we have of obtaining a world population compatible with sustainable development is by combining universal access to better health services, resulting in lower child and maternal death rates; progress toward gender equality; universal access to effective education (particularly for girls); and the universal availability of family planning information and services adapted to each country's needs and values.

This will hasten solutions to the main problems that vex and threaten humankind on the threshold of the 21st century -- the problems of poverty, population, and environmental degradation that feed off of one another in a downward spiral that brings instability and strife in its wake.

My message to you today is simply this: these actions are now within our grasp. They are possible. They are achievable within a decade or two. They would be politically popular in both developing and developed countries. They would respond to the needs of women and children, of families and communities. The synergism of simultaneous action could produce results beyond the expectations of most by the years 2000, 2015 and 2050. This is the historic challenge of the last phase of the 20th century -- success would lay the foundation for more balanced development in the 21st century.

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All of these improvements in the human condition would cry out to be achieved even if there were no such thing as a population challenge. But it is population growth that is now transforming social development goals of this kind from being timeless issues of primary concern to the poor into a race against time in which all have a stake. Strategies of development which involve rather than marginalize the poor, which create productive and remunerative work for the vast majority, and which meet basic human needs for adequate nutrition, clean water, safe sanitation, primary health care, primary education, and family planning, have become not only a moral minimum for our civilization but a practical minimum for ensuring its survival.

Children are at the heart of Cairo deliberations

It is impossible to talk about population and development without talking about children. A quarter million of them will come into the world today -- and a quarter million will die this week, unceremoniously ushered into the next world by poverty and neglect. Children -- their survival, development and protection -- are at the heart of our deliberations here this week, no less than women.

For UNICEF, concerned so directly with children and women, the importance of this conference is clear. Birth spacing and responsible parenthood are vital ingredients for child survival and development, and vital also for improvements in women's health. Many studies from all parts of the world show that child mortality is significantly reduced when there is an interval of two years or more between births. Moreover, births that are too early or too late in a mother's life, certainly before 18 and after about age 35, are also associated with increased risks and increased rates of child and maternal mortality.

Experience has demonstrated the importance of child survival strategies in combination with family planning, education of girls and women, and basic health care for mothers and children. Each of these interventions can make a contribution toward reducing under five mortality and slowing population growth. Collectively the interventions act powerfully and synergistically to accomplish these ends.

The child survival-population link

A principal reason that dramatically improving the survival of infants and children slows rather than accelerates population growth is that parents gain the confidence they need to more widely space childbirths and to successfully aim for a smaller completed family size on average. Of particular importance in both areas is widespread and effective access to family planning information and

services. Such interventions as female education, and maternal and child health care also play crucial and synergistic roles.

Up to a quarter of all deaths of women of reproductive age in developing countries are due to pregnancy-related complications. Through reproductive health programmes, including Safe Motherhood efforts and, more recently, the Mother-Baby Package of interventions, we can halve maternal mortality and reduce neonatal and peri-natal mortality by 30-40 per cent by the year 2000. Where women receive proper health care -- particularly during pregnancy and childbirth -- fertility rates tend to decline, births are spaced further apart, and family size becomes a more conscious choice on the part of women and couples.

Under five mortality and fertility rates are today so closely linked, and respond so powerfully to such interventions as greatly broadened access to primary health care and basic education, that declines in one are unlikely to take place in the absence of declines in the other. This suggests that, to achieve their own goals, those who work to stabilize world population early and at relatively lower levels could virtually adopt as a priority the achievement of the World Summit for Children goal of reducing under five deaths. Conversely, those who seek the greater survival of infants and children could well seek as their own priority the spacing of births and responsible parenthood.

The reality, of course, is that neither group needs to abandon its own cause. They have only to make common cause, because achievement of either goal -- increased child survival or slowed population growth -- virtually presupposes and requires accomplishment of the other. Effective child survival strategies work in tandem with effective family planning services to significantly weaken the links among poverty, population growth and environmental deterioration.

Last year, Population Council President Margaret Catley-Carlson proposed, in her Paul Hoffman Lecture, that "a 'child-first' policy should be explored as a basis for policies and programs among those concerned with population." She noted that early population activists used to stress that 'every child should be a wanted child'. She continued:

"I am not sure at the time we understood what this could actually mean. Armed with the information we have about the possibility of discrimination among children and the daily evidence on the streets of many large cities of the abandonment of children, it is time that child rights, along with adults' reproductive rights, enter into thinking about what human rights, when fully explored, will mean to population policy. Among other things, we must increase children's claim on the emotional and economic resources of both their parents."

The great potential of this conference

This meeting holds the promise of being a most historic world gathering. The several reasons include:

First, the great breakthrough at the core of the Programme of Action awaiting your endorsement is the recognition that only a holistic approach to problems of population and development can succeed. If effectively carried out, this approach can produce results that few envisage today. For the first time, the world community is coming together behind a common understanding of the inter-relationships and synergisms between improved family planning information and services; efforts to reduce infant, child and maternal mortality; literacy and basic education; gender equality and empowerment of women throughout the life cycle, starting with girls -- which are the main factors influencing the choices of individuals and couples regarding family size.

As noted in the Preamble, implementating the goals and objectives of the present 20 year Programme of Action would address many of the fundamental population, health, education and development challenges facing the entire human community. What is more, it would also result in world population growth during this period and beyond at levels close to the United Nations low variant -- that is, peaking in the year 2050 at less than 8 billion and declining thereafter.

Discussing population in the context of sustainable development also helps us to avoid some of the pitfalls that have made the debate on population issues so difficult. Most importantly, the emerging Cairo consensus does not "blame the victim"; that is, the population problem is not reduced to blaming the poor, especially poor women, for having too many children. This simplistic and quite frankly, dangerous thesis gave rise to population control efforts which -- however well-intentioned -- were widely interpreted as thinly disguised campaigns against the poor and to control women's lives.

The sustainable development perspective says that population is not merely an issue of numbers, but primarily one of poorly distributed and wasted resources, of unsustainable production and consumption patterns. Population is now being viewed both as a common problem of the wasteful, overconsuming North as well as of the rapidly-growing, underdeveloped South. What is needed, then, is a partnership of North and South to chart a path toward population policies rooted in equitable and sustainable development for all. Instead of coercion, the new approach to population policy must broaden the rights, opportunities and choices of women and families.

From this common understanding of the problem, a concerted, global effort needs to be mounted without delay.

Second, by embracing the concrete goals set forth in the Programme of Action, this conference can help accelerate momentum in an area where unprecedented progress is already underway -- improvements for children -- which will in turn have a major synergistic impact on slowing population growth.

At the 1990 World Summit for Children -- the first-ever global summit, the world's leaders noted the important impact of reductions in child mortality on fertility levels. In their Plan of Action, they pointed out that:

"Achievement of the goals for children and women [goals subsequently endorsed by the Earth Summit and incorporated into Agenda 21, I would add parenthetically] would also contribute to lowering population growth, as sustained decline in child death rates towards the level at which parents become confident that their first children will survive is, with some time lag, followed by even greater reduction in child births."

The child survival effect is especially strong when women and couples also have access to education and family planning information and services.

I have recently seen a draft study presented at Harvard's Center for Population and Development and soon to be published by the University of Pennsylvania that attempts to quantify the inter-relationship of child mortality reduction and fertility change, along with many of the other factors directly and indirectly influencing them.

This work-in-progress suggests that achievement of the child mortality reduction goal of the World Summit for Children -- a one-third reduction by the year 2000 -- would contribute to a world population that is even lower than the UN's low projection.

I emphasize this not to single out child mortality reduction as the principal driving force for slowing population growth -- we know this is not the case -- but simply to stress its importance alongside the other major factors and conditions that converge and inter-act to enable individuals and couples to choose to have smaller families. No population in the developing world has experienced a sustained fertility reduction without first having gone through a major decline in infant and child mortality.

Progress for the world's children

We have seen great progress in preventing child deaths over the past three decades. When I came to the United Nations Children's Fund in 1980, 15 million children were dying every year

of largely preventable causes; today, with births more than 15 per cent per cent greater, the figure has been brought down below 13 million. With our vastly greater capacity to reach all children with the fruits of modern science and medicine, we now have a good shot at cutting 1990 levels by another 2 million annually by the end of next year if a series of mid-decade goals already agreed to by the developing countries in the follow-up to the World Summit for Children are met by December 1995. This will give us momentum to achieve the year 2000 goals that will cut further millions from this obscene and unnecessary death toll. National Programmes of Action to meet these goals have been issued or drafted by some 120 countries to date and now cover about 90 percent of the world's children.

A good start has been made, as reflected in achievement of the 1990 goal of immunizing fully 80 per cent of all the world's children against the six main killer diseases of childhood. It is also now clear that a majority of developing countries are already on track to achieve a majority of the 13 mid-decade goals; with a concerted international effort over the next 16 months, both of these majorities could be increased significantly.

Pursuing today's low-cost opportunities to protect the health, nutrition, and education of women and children in the developing world is one of the most immediately available and affordable ways of weakening the grip of poverty, population growth, and environmental deterioration, which are among the greatest threats facing humankind on the threshold of the 21st century.

For these reasons, we are confident that this conference will unbracket the language contained in Chapter VIII of the Programme of Action, action point 8.16, which reaffirms the World Summit goals for infant and child mortality reduction and calls for further progress beyond the year 2000. Failure to remove the brackets on this section would set the dangerous precedent of diminishing the commitments made by the heads of state and governments of 155 countries.

Third, this conference's recognition of the centrality of women is absolutely crucial, paving the way toward the World Social Summit in Copenhagen and the Beijing conference on women next year -- and, hopefully, toward major changes in the lives of women everywhere. The draft Programme of Action in its entirety captures the simple, incontrovertible truth that there will be no sustainable development, no stabilization of populations at manageable levels, no lasting solution to the problems of environment, no true democracy, and no peace, just so long as half of humanity continues to be subject to gross discrimination and abuse. We are also particularly gratified that the Programme of Action recognizes that gender-based discrimination against women can best be overcome by constructive action throughout the life cycle. Such action must begin with the girl child, where the

foundations will be laid for equality and empowerment later on in life.

Women have clearly taken the lead in the struggle for an end to gender discrimination. But speaking as a man and as the father of three sons, I can say that we males have our work cut out for us; we have a great deal of learning to do, and a great deal of changing to do, if gender equality is ever to be achieved.

In your deliberations on the Programme of Action, I urge you to build on the text of the World Summit for Children Declaration and Plan of Action, which sets the goal of ensuring "access... to information and services to prevent pregnancies that are too early, too closely spaced, too late or too many" -- and let me say in this connection that when we speak of family planning, we are not talking about abortion, which should not be a method of family planning.

The World Summit Plan of Action also set the goal of empowering "all women to breastfeed their children exclusively for four to six months." It is worth emphasizing that in addition to all its many extraordinary benefits to children, women and families, breastfeeding has played and still plays a major supporting role in slowing population growth, especially in the poorer countries. How many of us are aware that if there were no breastfeeding tomorrow, births would increase by an estimated 20 - 30 per cent? The Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University estimates that breastfeeding averts between 70 and 90 million births a year. Families, institutions and society at large must provide women who are mothers with the support and encouragement they need to breastfeed and thus have healthier children, more space between births, and greater personal health.

Let me say a word about the importance of youth in the context of population and development. Investing in the health and development of young people, particularly adolescents, is one of the most important actions we can take today. Teens need support, guidance and respect if they are to safely navigate the difficult transition from childhood to adulthood and establish healthy behaviours that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. To do this, we must understand their realities and listen to their concerns; youth need to be well-informed and actively involved in all efforts to promote their health and development.

Unfortunately, for too many girls around the world, with adolescence comes motherhood, and an overnight leap into adulthood. This is a cause for concern because young girls are not emotionally or physically ready for childbearing. Teenage pregnancies both within and outside marriage diminish young women's opportunities and increase their vulnerability to disease, maternal morbidity and mortality and poverty. As outlined in the Programme of Action, basic education, especially for girls, is critical to preventing a

cycle of early pregnancy and impoverishment. This, along with access to appropriate information and services, and the development of "life-skills", will help young people make informed decisions to prevent early parenthood and to enhance the quality of their lives as they grow into the adults of the 21st century. And recent studies have shown that delays of just a few years in marriage and childbearing could significantly contribute to slowing population growth.

In short, we must see to it that women are empowered to control their lives and their fertility, through education, jobs and access to health care, including family planning information and services. We must place special emphasis on informing, supporting and facilitating the participation of young people in their quest to live healthy and productive lives. And we must help men become responsible and participatory parents.

The 20/20 joint initiative

My fourth and final point refers to the vital question of resources. The modest funds required to implement the strategies and meet the goals established in the Programme of Action must be made available quickly and without conditionalities. There are indications that, with this conference, greater funding may be forthcoming for mainly one aspect of the action plan that is before us. As welcome as any sectoral increases obviously are, it is important to keep in mind the essential breakthrough taking place at this conference: recognition that any solution to population and development problems will require a holistic approach. And holistic funding, too -- which ideally, given the urgency of the inter-related threats facing one and all in the global village, should involve significant increases in resource availability for meeting the most critical goals.

Without for a moment renouncing our quest for increases toward meeting the long established goal of allocating 0.7 per cent of industrial countries' GDP to official development assistance (ODA) -- a goal inspired both by justice and prudence -- I commend to your attention the 20/20 initiative being promoted jointly by the United Nations Development Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, and UNICEF. It is alluded to on two occasions in the draft Programme of Action that is before you -- both of them in brackets. It is precisely the kind of holistic approach urgently needed for reallocating current levels of funding in order to jump-start implementation of the Programme of Action.

Simply put, what is involved is ensuring that national governments devote at least 20 per cent of their domestic budgets to providing basic social services -- primary health care including family planning, basic education, nutrition, and low cost water and sanitation for rural and peri-urban areas -- and that donor countries see to it that at least a similar proportion of their ODA

goes to support these strategic areas for sustainable human development. On average, current funding is much less a share of national budgets and of ODA.

From UNICEF's vantage-point of efforts for children in over 120 developing countries, we see significant progress in the 20/20 direction mostly on the developing country side. The donor community -- which has done so much to alert the world to the severity of the interlocking problems that confront us -- must do its part if these inescapable problems are to be tackled in time.

If this conference is followed by serious action to increase and wisely reallocate resources for population and development in the holistic manner I described, we will truly be tapping the potential of the post-Cold War era for international cooperation.

A crisis point in history/an opportunity for concerted action.

Before closing, permit me to quote from the Joint Statement on World Population issued last year by 56 of the world's Scientific Academies:

"History is approaching a crisis point with respect to the interlocking issues of population, environment, and development. Scientists today have the opportunity and responsibility to mount a concerted effort to confront our human predicament. But science and technology can only provide tools and blueprints for action and social change. It is the governments and international decision-makers, including those meeting in Cairo ... who hold the key to our future. We urge them to take incisive action now and to adopt an integrated policy on population and sustainable development on a global scale. With each year's delay the problems become more acute. Let 1994 be remembered as the year when the people of the world decided to **act together** for the benefit of future generations."

And I would like to emphasize the "act together". We must not allow well-publicized disagreements to obscure or undermine the unprecedented consensus that has consolidated around the bulk of the Programme of Action. The extraordinary breadth of agreement that now exists on most of the fundamentals of population and development is what must be preserved and enhanced here this week -- and especially in the weeks, months and years of concerted global action ahead.

Our children and grandchildren -- and unborn generations to come -- are depending on us here in Cairo to make the wise decisions that will determine their future. The choice is in our hands.