



INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION IN THE FIELD OF POPULATION

Perspectives on Major Population and Development Issues

Population growth, movements and composition shape the very nature of a society's development. Population dynamics, in turn, are conditioned by the environmental, social, economic and political contexts. Efforts to better understand these complex relationships must be pursued, and this knowledge must be integrated into strategies for sustainable development.

People are the core of development, its driving force and primary beneficiaries. Satisfying human needs and improving people's quality of life are the fundamental thrust of development. At the same time, rapid population growth is a serious challenge to sustainable development and improved quality of life for both individuals and groups. Rapid population growth can delay or even reverse essential social development, and puts pressure on the economic infrastructure, employment-generating capacities and efforts to combat poverty. It exerts pressures on the bio-physical environment that will be compounded as developing countries increase their standards of living and per-capita consumption.

Population pressures are most effectively addressed by the mutually reinforcing effects of social development (such as female education, improved women's health, modern labour force participation and decreased infant and child mortality), and quality family-planning services. Family-planning services furnish the information and technology needed to realize reproductive choices.

In the past, the major population challenge was the creation of demand for family-planning services. Presently, the expressed need for family-planning services in developing countries outstrips the supply. This imbalance between need for services and supply of resources will grow considerably over the next decades, as large numbers of children and young adults move into their reproductive years. Meeting this need would have a significant impact on addressing population pressures. It would facilitate the achievement of sustainable development objectives, and would contribute to improving the situation and status of women.

It has become clear over the last two decades that the quality of family-planning services needs to be improved and expanded to reflect the broader context of reproductive health care. The latter also includes education and counselling on sexuality and infertility; prevention, screening and treatment of diseases and infections of the reproductive tract (in particular sexually transmitted diseases which increase susceptibility to AIDS); prenatal care; supervised delivery; post-partum care; promotion of breastfeeding; and infant health care.

While AIDS might have significant impact on some segments of the population in some geographic areas, it will have a limited impact on overall population growth in developing countries. AIDS, however, has clearly defined the social and human costs of not including reproductive health services such as the screening and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases in previous family planning programmes. In addition to their