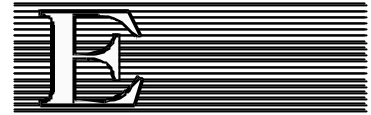




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**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN AFRICA:
HARMONIZING POPULATION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH
IN THE PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTING THE ICPD PROGRAMME OF ACTION**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The 1994 ICPD Programme of Action recognised among other things the inter-relationships between population, sustained economic growth and sustainable development. As it mentions, demographic factors, combined with poverty and lack of access to resources in some areas, and excessive consumption and wasteful production patterns in others, cause or exacerbate problems of environmental degradation and resource depletion and thus inhibit sustainable development.

2. Efforts to slow population growth, reduce poverty, achieve economic progress, improve environmental protection and reduce unsustainable consumption and production patterns are mutually reinforcing. Persistent widespread poverty and serious social and gender inequities have significant influences on, and are in turn influenced by, demographic factors such as population growth, structure and distribution. Unsustainable consumption and production patterns are contributing to the unsustainable use of natural resources and to environmental degradation. Sustained economic growth within the context of sustainable development is essential to eradicate poverty. Eradicating poverty will contribute to slowing population growth and to achieving early population stabilisation. Today, the population issue is a developmental issue that calls for a long-term and holistic approach in the context of sustainable development.

3. According to recent reports¹ of the United Nations, world population grew from 1.6 billion to 6.1 billion in the twentieth century (1900-2000), with about 85 per cent of the growth having taken place in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The world population is expected to be between 7.9 billion and 10.9 billion by 2050, i.e. a net addition of 77 million people per year. By that time, Africa is expected to almost triple its population size, thus accounting for 40% of the world population change. Globally, the number of older persons (60+) will more than triple, increasing to nearly 2 billion by 2050. In addition, international migration is projected to remain high during the twenty-first century and have a significant impact on population growth.

4. World food production has increased at a faster rate than population, and more food per capita is available now than ever before in world history. Nevertheless, the increasing scarcity and degradation of agricultural and other environmental resources cast serious doubt as to how long food production can surpass population growth. Throughout the world, many fragile, biologically unique ecosystems and the many species of plants and animals they contain are threatened. Fresh water is already in short supply in some regions and future population growth will increase the pressure on this renewable, but limited resource.

5. With globalisation, and new and emerging technologies and modes of production and consumption, the relationships among population, environment and development have become issues of heightened concern for governments, the international community and the people. Therefore, population and development policies, especially those relating to the size, growth and distribution of population, are necessary and vital to ensure sustainable development and to safeguard the environment during the twenty-first century and beyond.

¹ *Report on World Demographic Trends based on the results of World Population Prospects: the 2000 Revision and Report on World Population Monitoring, 2001: Population, Environment and Development*

6. This paper, prepared as an input to the Second meeting of the ECA Committee on Sustainable Development, attempts to review the concept of population in relation to sustainability and assess the regional and global follow-up activities for the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action.

II. POPULATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

7. The links between population and development have always been seen within the context of population and resources. This issue has engaged the attention of traditional economists like Malthus who were worried about rapid population growth in the face of limited resources. With the emergence of environmental movements in the early 1970s, the whole question was extended to the links between population, environment and development and today, it encompasses sustainable development.

8. The concept of "population and sustainability" acknowledges a causal chain in the inter-linkages among the dynamics of population, environment, agriculture, and the socio-economic development, i.e. rapid population growth in Africa, combined with poverty and little scientific and technological progress are noted as the principal factors causing environmental degradation which consequently contributes to agricultural stagnation and in turn impedes food security and delays the onset of the demographic transition. Development strategies derived from these empirically determined population and socio-economic interrelationships will thus contribute significantly to sustainability if formulated and implemented by African countries.

9. The interrelationships between population, sustainability and development should therefore have clear policy priorities for the future that stress the need of harmonising population and economic growth rates in African countries. Indeed, if sustainable development is to take place, the population growth rate should not exceed the GDP growth rate. As a matter of fact, overly rapid population growth will entail ploughing a sizeable portion of investment capital into non-productive sectors, concentrating development efforts on reducing the imbalance between the population and available food, and combating environmental degradation.

10. Moreover, nowhere is the relationship between rapid population growth and development more apparent than in Africa in general and in Sub-Saharan Africa in particular. Unfortunately, African Governments have hardly been able to meet the demographic investment level required to satisfy the increasing needs of the rapidly growing population. Efforts made to promote social and economic development have been seriously limited by the dismal economic climate and the low budgetary resources of African countries.

11. If linking population and sustainability means focussing development on the welfare of the populations as both agents and beneficiaries of the development process, slowing down population growth and the development of human resources should then be viewed as the two main components of all sustainable development strategies in Africa. It should also be a spin-off from the final document adopted by the UNGASS which recommended key future actions needed to achieve the goals and objectives agreed to at the ICPD in the area of population and development.

III. THE FIVE-YEAR REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE ICPD PROGRAMME OF ACTION

12. Since the last meeting of the Committee on Sustainable Development (25-29 January 1999, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia), a range of activities have been undertaken at the national, regional and global levels towards undertaking the five-year-review and appraisal of the implementation of the recommendations of the ICPD Programme of Action (ICPD+ 5).

13. In Africa, the regional report on ICPD+ 5 –African experiences on the implementation of the Dakar/Ngor Declaration and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development - (FSSDD/ICPD/FC.3/99/6), was reviewed and endorsed by the First Meeting of the Committee on Sustainable Development, during a special session devoted to ICPD+ 5 event.

14. The regional report documents experiences, particularly the main achievements including policy changes that have occurred since ICDP, constraints encountered and success stories in the following key programme areas: (i) Institutional mechanisms for co-ordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of population programmes; (ii) Reproductive health including family planning and sexual health, reproductive rights, and HIV/AIDS; (iii) Gender equality, equity, empowerment of women and male involvement; (iv) Advocacy and IEC strategies; and (v) Forging partnerships with the NGOs, civil society and private sector.

15. At the global levels, the United Nations General Assembly special session (UNGASS) on ICPD+ 5 was convened on 30 June-02 July 1999 in New York to analyse the operational experience at the country level and determine progress made and constraints faced in the implementation of the Programme of Action. The 177 Member States participating in the special session adopted by consensus the final document on proposals for --Key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development – (A/S-21/5/Add.1).

16. The comprehensive document adopted at the UNGASS states that the five-year review of progress showed that the implementation of the Conference's recommendations had had positive results. Many countries have taken steps to integrate population concerns into their development strategies. In addition, many civil society organizations are contributing to the formulation and implementation of policies, programmes and projects on their own or in partnerships with governmental and intergovernmental organizations, as well as with the private sector.

17. However, the document shows that, in some countries and regions, including Africa, progress has been limited. Some of the major limitations findings of the review process include the following: financial constraints; lack of access to appropriate information and services for young people; weak political commitment to adolescents' rights and to reproductive health; worsening of the HIV/AIDS situation; persistence of unsafe abortion.

18. Based on the main findings of the review process, the final document outlines key future actions needed to achieve the goals and objectives agreed to at the ICPD in the following five substantive sections: (i) population and development concerns; (ii) gender equality, equity and empowerment of women; (iii) reproductive rights and reproductive health; (iv) partnerships and collaboration; (v) mobilizing resources.

19. Of great importance in building consensus on the importance of harmonising population and economic growth rates in African countries, is the fact that the final document adopted at the UNGASS affirms that the ICPD Programme of Action articulated a comprehensive approach to issues of population and development. It also reflected the view that an early stabilization of the world population would make a crucial contribution to realizing the objective of sustainable development.

IV. SLOWING DOWN POPULATION GROWTH AS A COMPONENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN AFRICA: BEST PRACTICES

20. The objective of fostering demographic transition in Africa to lower levels of fertility and population growth rates is to prevent the dissipation of the fruits of growth and thus promote sustainability. It should also be a spin-off from the final document adopted by the UNGASS which recommended key future actions needed to achieve the goals and objectives agreed to at the ICPD in the area of population and development, including accelerating fertility declines in countries with a high level of fertility, most of which are located in Sub-Saharan Africa.

21. Among the African countries with high fertility levels, the delayed transition to lower fertility is explained by cultural and economic factors such as the following: universal and early marriage, low level of female education, low status of women, lagging socio-economic changes that are yet to happen in most parts of these countries especially in rural areas, and strong religious and socio-cultural reluctances to family planning.

22. Since best experiences on sustained fertility decline within Africa and other developing regions may be used to derive useful lessons and/or conclusions that might be of interest to countries with high fertility levels, it seems useful to look at the fertility transition where it has occurred in order to better understand its determinants. Within Africa, the well known examples of countries experiencing sustained fertility declines are, among others, Botswana, Mauritius and Tunisia.

23. Mauritius stands out as a good example of an African country that has managed to control its population growth despite its multi-cultural context. The success of Mauritian population management has been largely attributed to full commitment of government both for logistic support and financial backing. The easy acceptance of family planning programmes by the population facilitated the fertility decline. The explanation also lies in the high level of social development and basic education and empowerment of women. The fertility rate in Mauritius reached replacement level in the late 1980s.

24. Botswana's high economic performance has combined with the government's strong commitment towards spreading the social services to make it one of the few African countries with a successful population management programmes. There are many various pragmatic and positive policies that Botswana has pursued during the last decade which have greatly contributed towards achieving fertility transition. These policies include the following: extending social benefits in health and education to a wide spectrum of population; investing in the key physical and institutional infrastructures to facilitate the delivery of these services; providing universal free education for primary level and closing the gender gap in access to education and employment; promoting a systematic integrated health care system; adopting a population policy integrated into development planning at all levels; enjoying relative peace and stability; and promoting democratic principles.

25. In Tunisia, the steady decline in fertility observed during the last two decades has been attributed to joint action to raise the marriage age and to promote the use of contraception during the past three decades. The success of the fertility transition in Tunisia can also be explained by the fact that the country's population policy is not only clear and well planned, but is also backed by relevant legislation and by political will at the highest level.

26. The fertility decline that occurred in parts of South Asia (Sri Lanka) has also been attributed to changing marriage patterns, strong family planning programmes and a decline in marital fertility. The explanation also lies in the changes that occurred in the socio-economic system which reduced the centrality of the family in wider social and economic relations, and placed a greater premium on an individual's own ability and attribute. In Latin America, two sets of determinants of fertility decline have been put forward: (i) The proximate determinants such as contraception and abortion; and (ii) socio-economic determinants such as education, urban/rural residence, and economic conditions.

27. Currently, however, the gains in human survival and improved quality of life are seriously threatened by HIV/AIDS and other diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis. Simultaneous efforts should, therefore, also be made to mitigate these negative effects. This will ensure the elimination of the traditional insurance for old age by having many children so that when some die, some survive to look after their parents in old age.

V. THE WORK OF ECA AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

28. The overarching objective of every development intervention in Africa is the reduction of poverty. However, no single development actor possesses the means or the comparative advantage to tackle the entire gamut of required activities. Therefore, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has used selectivity and leveraging of its comparative advantage in identifying specific services and associated modalities for partnership and implementation. The services and modalities offered by the Commission fall in the following broad areas: 1) Advocacy and policy analysis; 2) Convening stakeholders and building consensus; 3) Technical cooperation and capacity building; and 4) Enhancing the UN's role in Africa.

29. Since 1996, therefore, the Commission has organized its work around eight themes. These are: 1) Supporting effective poverty-reduction policies; 2) Expanding trade and investment opportunities; 3) Raising gender awareness; 4) Addressing population, environment, and agricultural linkages; 5) Harnessing information for development; 6) Promoting regional cooperation and integration; 7) Promoting the capable state; and 8) Forging partnerships for Africa's development. With regard to the fourth theme, on population and more immediate development issues, the Commission helps Member States to promote food security and sustainable development by a set of activities centred on three sub-thematic tasks: i) Planning and implementing activities to raise policy makers' awareness of the urgency of food, population, and environmental concerns (the nexus issues) in development planning, while offering Member States feasible solutions drawn from best practices within Africa and around the world; ii) Encouraging member countries to develop and take full advantage of their abilities to foster and utilize science and technology in addressing the nexus issues; and iii) Providing policy analysis support and dissemination services through workshops, training seminars, information exchange, and technical advisory services to enhance understanding and management of the complex interactions between agricultural productivity, population, environment, technology and food security. Since ICPD, the Commission has played a leading role in coordinating the activities of

the Follow-up Committee on the implementation of ICPD-PA.

30. The Commission's work on sustainable development is conducted through its Food Security and Sustainable Development Division (FSSDD). The Division was set up to play the front-line role of creating awareness on the nexus issues (the interactions of rapid population growth, environmental degradation and declining agricultural production), and ensure that they attain priority status in advocacy and policy analysis, and are integrated in development policies and strategies. A review of the Division's activities provides medium- to long-term views and plans on the nexus issues.

31. FSSDD pursues its mandate through a number of multidisciplinary approaches which include organizing and implementing its work along three major themes:

- Supporting the transition to higher agricultural productivity;
- Facilitating the demographic transition to smaller and healthier families; and
- Promoting the transition to the sustainable use of scarce natural resources.

32. With the multidisciplinary approach in mind, ECA/FSSDD set out to search for and devise appropriate tools, materials and channels that would facilitate the provision of its services in advocacy and technical areas such as policy analysis. Among the tools and materials it has developed for the advocacy process, is a computer simulation model (PEDA Computer Model) that can be used to illustrate the interactions between population changes (P), environment (E), socio-economic development (D) and agriculture (A). The model relies on multi-state demographic techniques, projecting at the same time eight different population subgroups (by age and sex) based on three dichotomous individual characteristics: urban/rural place of residence, literacy status and food security status. Through the setting of scenario variables, the model enables the user to project the population that will be food secure and food insecure for a chosen point in time. It also demonstrates a number of other variables related to the socio-economic development of a country. In addition, the model includes an HIV/AIDS component aimed at illustrating its impact on the other variables in the model. As such, the PEDA model is able to give answers to a wide range of policy questions regarding the interactions of the nexus issues.

VI. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

33. Slowing down population growth and the development of human resources are major components of sustainable development. Therefore, while every effort is made to improve the quality of life of every individual, ways should be found to reduce the fertility rates and generate slower population growth rates.

34. Various experiences of sustained fertility decline indicate that the fertility transition that occurred within Africa and elsewhere was a consequence of two major factors: an increase in the age at marriage and a control of the marital fertility. The delayed age at marriage was a result of socio-economic changes which were mainly a consequence of a better educational and health care system while the control of marital fertility was a result of a well planned and carefully executed family planning system. However, these factors were accompanied by other societal changes that reinforced their impact. Among these was the increasing centrality of the family, the increasing cost of living and the decreasing opportunities in agriculture.

35. Despite the fact that most of the African countries have also formulated population policies and implemented family planning programmes, the fertility rates are still higher than 5 children per

woman. It is therefore crucial that these countries draw the lessons from the above experiences to achieve their fertility transition.

36. Ways should also be found to reduce and eliminate the negative effects on human survival and welfare generated by HIV/AIDS and other diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis. It is through emphasizing the importance of the quality of individual life that reproduction will be motivated by the desire for quality children rather than numbers of children.

37. Africa's sub-regional diversity and disparities within nations make it hazardous to venture any general proposals and strategies for reducing fertility on the continent. However, recent experiences of fertility decline in Africa do provide the evidence that the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social and economic, and health status are not only necessary conditions for the further decline of fertility, but are also essential for the achievement of sustainable development.

38. Indeed African women spend most of their life span in fulfilling their roles of human reproduction. Early marriage and its universality and low use of modern contraceptive are the main determinants of the observed high level of marital fertility. Achieving change requires policy and programme actions that will ensure the enhancement of women's contribution to sustainable development through their full involvement and participation in all aspects of education, skill development and employment, income-generating activities, health, science and technology, and other population and development –related activities.