



## POPULATION AND THE 21ST CENTURY

### *UNFPA and Agenda 21*

### Introduction

The inextricable link between population and the environment was recognized as far back as 1974 when the World Population Plan of Action (WPPA) adopted at the first World Population Conference in Bucharest included as one of its objectives: "To advance national and international understanding of the complex relations among the problems of population, resources, environment and development, and to promote a unified analytical approach to the study of these interrelationships and to relevant policies." The International Conference on Population held in 1984 reaffirmed the WPPA and was equally specific on the necessity for an "integrated approach that takes into account the interrelationship between population, resources, environment and development." In 1989, the International Forum on Population in the Twenty-first Century, held in Amsterdam, also acknowledged that "population, resources and environment are inextricably linked and stress our commitment to bringing about a sustainable relationship between human numbers, resources and development."

**The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)**, held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, marked a breakthrough in the discussion of population and environment issues. At the Conference, a succession of world leaders, heads of agencies and eminent individuals stated their belief that population was one of the key issues in the fight for sustainable development. As Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland noted at the opening session, "poverty, environment and population can no longer be dealt with—or even thought of—as separate issues." This conviction was reflected in Agenda 21, the blueprint for action adopted by the Conference.

**UNFPA** responded to the UNCED process in three ways. First, the Fund actively participated in the process itself and contributed to the various UNCED preparatory committees and expert groups. The Fund also produced and distributed publications dealing with various aspects of the interrelationship between population and the environment. Second, following the Conference, UNFPA began examining its activities

to see how well they fit with the intentions and prescriptions of Agenda 21 and, correspondingly, what could be done to adapt those that did not. Third, the Fund continued to build upon the international understanding reached at Rio on the population and environment interrelationship in its preparations for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994.

The **ICPD** referred to and reinforced the concerns in Chapter 5 of Agenda 21 by noting the complex interrelationships between population, sustained economic growth, poverty and the environment. Chapter 3 of the ICPD Programme of Action urges that population factors, including not only population growth and age structure but also distribution, migration and reproductive health, be integrated into planning for sustainable development and a healthy environment. The significant influence of the status of women and girls in factors important to demographic transition and to the achievement of sustainable development is also emphasized as is the involvement of women in population and environment decision-making at all levels.

As part of its follow-up to UNCED, UNFPA has identified those chapters and programme areas of Agenda 21 that have programmatic, institutional and/or financial implications for UNFPA, concentrating on those that are at or near the core of the Fund's concerns and mandate. This booklet is a synthesis of UNFPA policies and programme activities directly relevant to environmental concerns in the perspective of Agenda 21.

## Population and the Rio Declaration

The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development was intended to further mobilize action to promote sustainable development. The Rio Declaration is best viewed as a broad and general introduction to Agenda 21, the Conference's three-volume analysis of the global environment and development situation.

UNFPA's mandate, which focuses directly on people and their welfare, is well reflected in the first principle of the Rio Declaration, which states: "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature."

This principle is reinforced by the fifth principle, which urges all States and all people to: "cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, in order to decrease the disparities in standards of living and better meet the needs of the majority of the people of the world."

To be able to do this and to achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all, Principle 8 declares that: "States should reduce and eliminate unsustainable

patterns of production and consumption and *promote appropriate demographic policies.*"

## Population and Agenda 21

Due to the efforts of UNFPA and others, population as an issue of importance to the environment and development was put on the agenda of the UNCED preparatory process at the third Preparatory Committee meeting in August 1991.

From a population point of view, the key element of Agenda 21 is Chapter 5, "Demographic dynamics and sustainability." The activities and objectives proposed in this chapter are in complete harmony with UNFPA's mandate. In addition, at least nine other chapters of Agenda 21 are at or near the core of UNFPA's concerns. These are, in order of appearance:

- Chapter 3, "Combating poverty";
- Chapter 6, "Protecting and promoting human health conditions";
- Chapter 24, "Global action for women towards sustainable and equitable development";
- Chapter 25, "Children and youth in sustainable development";
- Chapter 27, "Strengthening the role of non-governmental organizations: partners for sustainable development";
- Chapter 33, "Financial resources and mechanisms"; Chapter 36, "Promoting education, public awareness and training";
- Chapter 37, "National mechanisms and international cooperation for capacity-building in developing countries"
- Chapter 38, "International institutional arrangements."

In addition, there are a number of programme areas in other chapters that are relevant to UNFPA activities or to which UNFPA activities may contribute. The following pages briefly summarize the major provisions of these chapters.

## Demographic Dynamics and Sustainability

### CHAPTER 5.

World population, 5.5 billion in 1992, will, according to the United Nations medium projection, reach 8.04 billion in 2025 and 9.4 billion in 2050. Over the next decade, more than half the population growth will be in Africa and South Asia where land degradation potential is most severe.

UNFPA is charged with extending sustained assistance to developing countries, at their request, in dealing with their population problems. Today, UNFPA supports programmes, policies and activities in some 160 countries.

All the actions and policies recommended in Chapter 5 aim at the integration of demographic trends and population factors into all aspects of sustainable development planning and environmental protection.

Thus, in the span of not quite 20 years, three major international conferences have called for concerted action on population, the environment and development, pointing to the continuing nature of the task. The following numbered paragraphs are highlights from three programme areas comprising 65 paragraphs in Chapter 5:

(A) "Formulating integrated national policies for environment and development, taking into account demographic trends and factors;

In this programme area, UNFPA, in collaboration with the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), has undertaken a major research and policy analysis project entitled, "Population and Sustainable Development: Mauritius." This project measured the interdependence between the size and structure of populations, their socio-economic and technological development, and their physical environment. Case studies of this nature could be used to build a comprehensive model that leads towards a better understanding of the population and environment link, development of appropriate methodologies to assess such links and formulation of policies to remedy undesirable interactions.

(B) "Developing and disseminating knowledge concerning the links between demographic trends and factors and sustainable development;

As part of its effort to ensure the integration of the population-resource balance in sectoral planning, UNFPA sponsored a guidebook on population, resources and environment in collaboration with the World Conservation Union (IUCN). This guidebook, which is available in English, French and Spanish, is used by planning officials in national planning ministries, and for awareness-creation at workshops and seminars. In 1997, a second guidebook prepared by IUCN with UNFPA's support, was published. The book, entitled "Population and Strategies for Sustainable Development", serves as a resource and a guide to assist national-level policy makers and the staff of conservation organizations in linking population and environment in strategies for sustainable development.

(C)"Implementing integrated environment and development programmes at the local level, taking into account demographic trends and factors."

In Vietnam, UNFPA and the Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning (JOICFP) implemented an integrated project on Environmental Sanitation (ES), Intestinal Parasite Control (IPC), and Maternal and Child Health and

Family Planning (MCH/FP) for Family Health designed to increase the contraceptive prevalence rate while reducing the parasite infestation rate. This project strengthened the MCH/FP/ES delivery system through the integrated approach by conducting training of project personnel, developing and supplying the appropriate information, education and communication strategy and materials.

In one of the sections of Agenda 21 called "Basis for action," the first programme area starts by defining the problem in three paragraphs reproduced here in their entirety:

*"5.2. Demographic trends and factors and sustainable development have a synergistic relationship.*

*"5.3. The growth of world population and production combined with unsustainable consumption patterns places increasingly severe stress on the life-supporting capacities of our planet. These interactive processes affect the use of land, water, air, energy and other resources. Rapidly growing cities, unless well managed, face major environmental problems. The increase in both the number and size of cities calls for greater attention to issues of local government and municipal management. The human dimensions are key elements to consider in this intricate set of relationships and they should be adequately taken into consideration in comprehensive policies for sustainable development. Such policies should address the linkages of demographic trends and factors, resource use, appropriate technology dissemination, and development. Population policy should also recognize the role played by human beings in environmental and development concerns. There is a need to increase awareness of this issue among decision-makers at all levels and to provide both better information on which to base national and international policies and a frame-work against which to interpret this information.*

*"5.4. There is a need to develop strategies to mitigate both the adverse impact on the environment of human activities and the adverse impact of environmental change on human populations."*

## Combating Poverty

### CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3 of Agenda 21 provides the framework for a comprehensive attack on poverty. It recognizes poverty as a complex multidimensional problem, the resolution of which requires a specific anti-poverty strategy—itself a basic condition for ensuring sustainable development. It urges, inter alia, action to:

- Empower community and local groups;
- Provide basic education and primary and maternal health care; and
- Advance the status of women through their full participation in decision making. It calls on governments and the United Nations system to make poverty alleviation a priority task.

More than 1 billion people, or about one fifth of the world's population, live under conditions of extreme poverty, and the eradication of poverty has long been on the international agenda. The task, however, is not made easier by the fact that population growth is fastest among the poorest and in the poorest countries.

A more ambitious and aggressive pursuit of the eradication of poverty has become even more necessary with the realization, in recent years, that poverty is among the most significant contributing factors to environmental degradation.

UNFPA already supports a variety of projects and programmes with a direct bearing on poverty. These include maternal and child health and family planning programmes, which are typically targeted at rural inhabitants, the urban poor, women and youth because these groups are disproportionately affected by poverty. In research, the Fund supports a number of programmes and initiatives aimed at improving understanding of the relationship between poverty, population pressure and environmental degradation.

## Protecting and Promoting Human Health

### CHAPTER 6

Chapter 6 of Agenda 21 focuses on the extremely important issue of health, and especially on the need for primary health care. It urges also that greater emphasis be put on prevention programmes. To reach the overall objectives, five programme areas are identified and are quoted in their entirety:

- a. Meeting primary health care needs, particularly in rural areas;
- b. Control of communicable diseases;
- c. Protecting vulnerable groups;
- d. Meeting the urban health challenge;
- e. Reducing health risks from environmental pollution and hazards.

The magnitude of the tasks in each programme area can be overcome only through collaboration among countries, both developed and developing, and public and private international organizations.

A population in good health is at the core of all development efforts and family planning programmes. Between 1969 and 1995, the Fund allocated more than \$3.7 billion in grant assistance to developing countries. In 1996, it devoted almost 50 per cent of its total programme allocations to reproductive health and family planning and additionally nearly 20 per cent to information, education and communication related to population and reproductive health. Measures aimed at improving maternal and child health are integrated into family planning programmes and vice versa. The Fund has also set in motion a number of activities aimed at preventing acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). A major portion of UNFPA programme assistance goes to the World Health Organization (WHO), with which UNFPA has collaborated closely from the very beginning. It has also collaborated with a number of other United Nations agencies and organizations, notably UNICEF, in the field of reproductive health, MCH/FP. The Fund

has also worked with NGOs that have activities in the field of health, women, population and development.

## Global Action for Women

### CHAPTER 24

Chapter 24 of Agenda 21 urges governments to adopt a variety of objectives and initiate numerous activities aimed at integrating women fully and equally in all development activities. Among the objectives listed in the chapter are the following:

- "To increase the proportion of women decision makers, planners, technical advisers, managers and extension workers in environment and development fields";
- "To consider developing and issuing by the year 2000 a strategy of changes necessary to eliminate constitutional, legal, administrative, cultural, behavioural, social and economic obstacles to women's full participation in sustainable development and in public life";
- "To formulate and implement clear governmental policies and national guidelines, strategies and plans for the achievement of equality in all aspects of society, including the promotion of women's literacy, education, training, nutrition and health and their participation in key decision-making positions and in management of the environment..."
- "To implement, as a matter of urgency, in accordance with country-specific conditions, measures to ensure that women and men have the same right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and have access to information, education and means, as appropriate, to enable them to exercise this right in keeping with their freedom, dignity and personally held values."

To achieve these and other objectives, governments are urged to undertake a number of activities, such as:

Reviewing policies and establishing plans to increase the proportion of women involved in all sustainable development activities;

- Increasing the enrolment and the educational standards of females;
- Instituting plans to lessen the heavy workload of women and girl children at home and outside through the provision of more and affordable kindergartens;

- Supporting and strengthening equal employment opportunities and equitable remuneration; and
- Introducing measures to enhance the economic opportunities of women.

The United Nations system, in particular, is asked to do its utmost to strengthen its programmes by incorporating the role of women. It is also called upon to improve opportunities for the advancement of women in the United Nations system itself.

Ever since it first became operational in 1969, UNFPA has been concerned with the health and status of women. A special four-year strategy for strengthening the Fund's capacity for dealing with issues concerning women, population and development was initiated in 1987, and later extended to cover the period to 1994.

Apart from enhancing its own capability to deal with women and development issues, the Fund has embarked on extensive cooperation with other agencies. Concern for the health and status of women is also integral to UNFPA-supported country and intercountry programmes.

The Fund continues to strengthen links with NGOs and has supported a variety of activities on women, population and environment, including sponsorship of a workshop on this subject during UNCED. This workshop enabled women from NGOs in developing countries to participate more fully in the activities of the Conference. Following UNCED in 1992, the Fund supported a conference on women and health in Mexico. An example of a country-level activity is a family welfare project in India that is being implemented by the Working Women's Forum in urban marginal areas of Madras and rural areas of Tamil Nadu.

In the area of research, UNFPA-supported projects are being implemented in Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico and Morocco to study the impact of environmental changes on women's health and time use. This research, which is being conducted by local institutions, also indicates that there is a dearth of knowledge at the micro-level about the interactions between women, population and the environment. The findings of these projects should make a significant contribution to filling this void.

## **Strengthening the Role of NGOs**

### **CHAPTER 27**

Chapter 27 recognizes NGOs as partners in the implementation of Agenda 21. Indeed, without their participation, it is difficult to see how the objectives of Agenda 21 could be reached at all. To that end, governments and international organizations are asked to accommodate NGOs and develop mechanisms that will allow them to play a partnership role. NGOs should not only participate in the implementation of Agenda 21 but also play a part among the institutions charged with reviewing and evaluating the implementation.

NGOs also participated in large numbers in the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo.

Throughout its existence, UNFPA has collaborated closely with a variety of NGOs which have served as executing agencies for UNFPA-funded activities all over the world. In 1991, for example, NGOs were the third largest recipients of UNFPA assistance. Organizations that have received UNFPA support include, inter alia, the International Planned Parenthood Federation, the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, the World Conservation Union, The Population Council, and numerous universities and research institutes in both developed and developing countries.

## Promoting Education

### CHAPTER 36

UNFPA recognized long ago the importance of creating awareness of the critical issues of population, environment and resources and has sought to do so through publications, sponsorship of and participation in conferences and symposia, and support for certain activities of specialized organizations.

UNFPA's 1988 State of World Population report, "Safeguarding the Future," for example, focused on the connected themes of population, environment and resources. This report gave rise to symposia in various countries, some of which were sponsored by UNFPA.

The cultivation of greater awareness of the issues involved is also carried out through other publications such as UNFPA's quarterly journal POPULI.

UNFPA's Global Programme of Training in Population and Development, undertaken in conjunction with institutions of learning in four countries, has increasingly integrated environmental concerns into its curricula.

## National Mechanisms and International Cooperation

### CHAPTER 37

Chapter 37 of Agenda 21 focuses on the capacity-building needs of the developing countries, addressing such issues as lack of skills, deficient institutional capacities and capabilities, and the technological and scientific requirements and resources needed to "enhance environmental knowledge and administration to integrate environment and development." The United Nations system and developed countries are asked to provide technical cooperation to help fill these needs and gaps.

Skills and know-how are as important as technology and other factors to the promotion of developmental and environmental sustainability, and support for various kinds of capacity-building measures has long been part of UNFPA country programmes. Such measures range from the integration of population education programmes in the formal school system to support for the incorporation of family life education in the educational programmes of national cooperatives, workers' unions and adult literacy courses. Other measures include the provision, through the country programmes, for graduate and postgraduate scholarships and fellowships; the strengthening of national institutions' technical capabilities in the field of demography and population studies; and the provision of international courses for training in population and development.

## **International Institutional Arrangements**

### **CHAPTER 38**

Chapter 38 provides for the establishment of a Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), which will have the task of monitoring and reviewing progress in the implementation of Agenda 21. Like other members of the United Nations system, UNFPA will contribute to the work of, and report to, the CSD on its role in the implementation of Agenda 21.

## **Financial Resources**

### **CHAPTER 33**

A programme as ambitious as Agenda 21 requires much in the way of financial resources. The UNCED Secretariat estimated that the implementation of Agenda 21 in the developing countries would require in excess of \$600 billion per annum, of which some \$125 billion would have to come from the developed countries on grant or concession terms. This implies that the countries that are members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) would have to more than double their present official development assistance (ODA). Although some developed country donors that had pledged to reach the target for ODA of 0.7 per cent of gross national product (GNP) reaffirmed their pledge in Rio, not all were willing to set a date for its fulfilment. Others set the year 2000 as the target date. Still others have already reached and surpassed the target.

It is estimated that, at present, some \$9.5 billion is devoted to population activities in the developing countries, of which almost 80 per cent is provided by the developing countries themselves. To be able to live up to the intentions of Agenda 21, support for population activities should, according to ICPD Programme of Action of 1994, reach \$17 billion a year by the turn of the century. The \$17 billion is the minimum annual cost for

core population activities required for universal access to modern reproductive health care and family planning services. To reach the ICPD funding goal, the Programme of Action recommends that donor countries increase their share of spending from one quarter to one third of the total—from the current \$2 billion to about \$3.6 billion (with an additional \$2.1 billion from foundations and international financial institutions)—in the year 2000.

## Children and Youth

### CHAPTER 25

The objectives set forth in Chapter 25 include the following:

- Promoting dialogue between the youth community and government at all levels;
- Ensuring access to secondary education;
- Reducing current levels of youth unemployment;
- Promoting the involvement of youth representation in United Nations processes; and
- Combating human rights abuses against young people.

To reach these objectives, governments are urged to take appropriate measures so that youth from "all parts of the world [can] participate actively in...decision-making... In addition to their intellectual contribution and their ability to mobilize support, they bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into account."

The children and youth of today are tomorrow's parents. A population policy that does not seek to prepare children and especially youth for the responsibilities and implications of adulthood and parenthood is unlikely to be successful. UNFPA has, therefore, sought to increase awareness among government officials of the importance of formulating national policies concerning the reproductive health of youth and of allocating resources accordingly. To this end, UNFPA distributed a Programme Advisory Note on Youth to UNFPA staff, government officials and national and international NGOs active in the area of youth recommending greater attention to meeting young people's reproductive health needs and services and to facilitate their participation in population and development programmes. It further stressed the importance of developing comprehensive national strategies on youth, population and development. The Fund has supported a variety of youth-related activities at the country level, for example, studies of attitudes and practices regarding adolescent sexuality. Peer education and youth-to-youth counselling on adolescent reproductive health has met with considerable success in several countries. For example, a youth-to-youth

reproductive health and family planning information, education and counselling pilot project in South Africa was replicated throughout the country. UNFPA also supported several interregional youth activities. UNFPA sponsored an African Forum on Adolescent Health which made recommendations for national programmes. UNFPA also sponsored an international youth essay contest. The essays demonstrated youth understanding of population and reproductive health. Environmental preservation and sustainable development are closely linked to the security and health of youth.

Chapter 25 of Agenda 21 focuses precisely on these questions. The point is made that, today, youth, i.e., those between the ages of 10 and 24, constitute about 28 per cent of the world's population and an even higher percentage of the developing world's population. It is easy to see from these numbers how important the involvement of youth in environmental and developmental decision making is to the long-term success of Agenda 21.

## Conclusions

Since the Fund's limited resources need to be utilized in support of action programmes within UNFPA's mandate, it will not be possible to support the implementation of action programmes aimed at producing non-polluting technologies, decentralizing congested urban areas, reforestation and resettlement programmes, water purification, more balanced habitats, etc. Though it is important to understand how these particular issues interact with population variables, growth and distribution to affect environments, actions to resolve them per se will be contingent on financial and technical assistance by agencies and organizations more directly concerned with them.

Therefore, UNFPA assistance in the area of population and environment will focus on research and analysis, including country case studies; awareness-creation and sensitization; integrated MCH/FP in environmental management projects; special women's projects; population policy formulation and planning; and training. In providing such assistance, however, emphasis will be placed on interagency cooperation and joint programming ventures. This is important because links between population and environment are complex, multi-disciplinary, and transcend sectoral concerns of governments and their development partners. Appropriate avenues for such ventures include, for example, the agencies of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP), comprising UNDP, UNICEF, IFAD, WFP and UNFPA, as well as international and national non-governmental agencies such as the World Conservation Union (IUCN).