



Statement
by
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(ESCAP)
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Agenda Item 3: Follow-up actions to the recommendations of the International Conference on Population and Development

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for allowing me the honor of presenting to you the views of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), regarding the contribution of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) to the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Programme of Action, adopted at the historic ICPD, is a comprehensive set of strategies which emphasize the explicit linkages between population and development and focus on meeting the needs of individual women and men. "The Programme of Actions is not only important contribution to other internationally agreed development goals, but that it is central and absolutely essential to their achievement. The fulfillment of the Cairo goals is fundamental to the MDGs". This was the shared vision and consensus emanated from the Expert Group Meeting to Assess the Progress in the Implementation of the Plan of Action on Population and Poverty adopted at the Fifth Asian and Pacific Population Conference, that ESCAP and UNFPA jointly organized last February.

The Asian and Pacific region, with slightly over 4 billion people in mid-2008, is home to 62 per cent of the world population, and the region continues to experience significant changes in its demographic features. During the past decade to 2008, it has witnessed a steady decline in the annual population growth rate to

1.0 per cent. Concomitant to the increase in contraceptive use, the total fertility rate (TFR) for the ESCAP region continued to drop, down from 2.5 children per women in 1998 to 2.2 children in 2008, which is close to the replacement level. During the same period, life expectancy at birth steadily increased to 67 years for males and 72 for females. Such changing demographic dynamics obviously affect the prospects for sustained development in the region, and consequently the prospects for achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

The Asia-Pacific region has been forging ahead on many of the issues and goals of the ICPD and the MDGs, which are closely linked and mutually reinforcing.

The region is an economic powerhouse. With some of the world's most dynamic economies, the region as a whole is likely to meet the 2015 MDG target of halving the proportion of people living in income poverty. The proportion of people living on less than one dollar (PPP) a day in the region has fallen from 31 per cent in 1990 to 17 per cent in 2004. During the same period, the absolute number of poor people also fell. The number of people living in extreme poverty declined from 1.9 billion in 1995 to 641 million in 2004, due mainly to sharp reductions of poverty in South East Asia and China.

Another major achievement of the region is the primary schooling, where nearly all countries have net enrolment ratios above 90 per cent, and for many the ratio is approaching 100 per cent. However, the performance is less impressive when it comes to completion, with many children, mostly from poor households, either repeating classes or dropping out of school before reaching grade five. Gender disparity also exists in primary education in several countries where data exist, leading to lower literacy rates for girls and low enrolment in secondary education.

One MDG indicator of women's empowerment is their share in non-agricultural wage employment. On this basis, women are doing well in some countries, with more women employed than men. In several Asia-Pacific countries, however, women are some way behind. Moreover, even when women are working, they are predominantly employed in labour-intensive, low-value-added manufacturing and service sector jobs. Women are also poorly represented in national parliaments; in many countries the percentage of parliamentary seats held by women is in single digits.

Improved reproductive health, the importance of which was underscored at the ICPD in 1994, is highly relevant to three of the eight MDG goals (Goal 4, 5 and 6), and the enhancement of reproductive health is a prerequisite for the other MDG goals. In the areas of health and child mortality, however, the performance of the Asia-Pacific region is less striking and not uniform. The region faces enormous challenges with the approach of the target year of 2015. For instance, some four million children in the region still die before they reach the age of five. Around a quarter of a million women die each year during childbirth or from pregnancy-related complications, and many are left chronically ill or disabled. Although HIV prevalence is relatively low in the region at 0.3 per cent, it translates into about 600 million people who are affected by the virus. Malaria and tuberculosis continue to be major disease of concern, affecting large numbers of people in the region.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

The global financial crisis occurred on the heels of a major shock from high food and fuel prices that imposed a heavy economic burden on many countries. Growth has already slowed down and their compounding impact has increased the incidence of poverty and vulnerability. This unprecedented threat may unravel much of the progress accomplished in achieving internationally agreed development goals.

In the midst of the current economic crisis, the strategies proposed in the internationally agreed documents are needed more than ever, in light of its likely impact on poor. The goals of ICPD and MDGs are too important and their implications too far-reaching for the well-being of humanity to be disputed or neglected. The renewed commitment of government, political will, stronger partnerships and coordinated efforts are critical than at any other time to weather the threats and challenges. At this critical juncture, ESCAP is committed to pay closer attention to the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, and willing to work closely with the governments of Asia and the Pacific for further realization of the goals.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.