



Press Release

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

POP/936
8 September 2005

ACHIEVING POPULATION GOALS WILL EASE PATH TO FULFILLING MILLENNIUM DECLARATION

United Nations Population Division Issues New Report Before 2005 World Summit, Largest Gathering of World Leaders in History

NEW YORK, 8 September (Department of Economic and Social Affairs) -- The reductions of fertility that developing countries began to experience in the 1970s and 1980s have opened up a "window of opportunity" by producing reductions in the share of children in the population and increasing the proportions of persons of working age, says a new report issued today. Provided jobs are available for the rising number of workers, developing countries can reap the benefits of the increased production and the lower costs associated with the decreasing proportion of dependent children.

According to the report, *Population Challenges and Development Goals*, issued by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, these changes can boost the rate of economic growth per capita and raise standards of living, easing the path to fulfilling the goals set in the Millennium Declaration. The experience of the newly industrialized countries in Asia provides an example of this outcome. These findings will prove useful as the world gets ready to discuss progress made in achieving the goals of the Millennium Declaration at the forthcoming United Nations World Summit taking place from 14 to 16 September.

The report examines the interrelations between the goals of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and those set in the Millennium Declaration, and discusses the various ways in which the full implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action can contribute to fulfilling the Millennium Declaration. In addition, the report provides an overview of world population trends and reviews population and development policies in order to highlight the wide variety of population trends that characterizes the major world regions today.

The report notes that the group of 50 least developed countries accounts today for 12 per cent of the world population, or 759 million, but is expected to absorb a quarter of all the population growth expected between 2005 and 2015. High fertility levels characterize the majority of the least developed countries. In addition, they exhibit high levels of extreme poverty, with 20 per cent of their combined population living on less than one dollar a day. In 10 of those countries, extreme poverty levels are higher than 40 per cent. Least developed countries would benefit the most from reductions of fertility brought about by the prevention of unwanted births, which the ICPD Programme of Action aims to achieve, although reductions of extreme poverty would also require the implementation of sound macroeconomic policies to increase economic growth, create jobs and raise the income share of the poor.

(more)

At the global level, extreme poverty may indeed be halved because of the advances being made by China and India, which together account for 2.4 billion of the world's 6.5 billion people. Today both countries have historically low levels of dependency. In China, there are five children and older persons for every 10 persons of working age, while in India the equivalent figure is six. Although both countries have sizeable proportions of the population living in extreme poverty -- 17 per cent in China and 35 per cent in India -- their economic growth has been substantial in recent times and is benefiting from the favourable distribution of the population resulting from the reductions of fertility that each country has attained. The demography of many other developing countries whose fertility has declined markedly in the past three decades is equally favourable, and together with sound macroeconomic and social policies can facilitate the reduction of poverty worldwide.

The ICPD Programme of Action, just as the Millennium Declaration, stresses the importance of achieving universal education by 2015, especially for girls. It also calls for extending education for all to the secondary level. Research shows that improving educational attainment is crucial for economic development because it increases human capital and initiates a virtuous circle whereby better educated parents favour the education of their children, take measures to improve the health of their offspring, and are better able to have the number of children they desire. Countries experiencing high fertility and rapid population growth have been hard pressed to ensure that all children get a primary education. Slowing their population growth by reducing fertility would facilitate the achievement of that goal, and requires that the poor and less educated segments of society get the information and means to achieve their desired family size.

Both the ICPD Programme of Action and the Millennium Declaration call for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women, recognizing that both are important in combating poverty and hunger and in attaining sustainable development. To achieve this goal, the Programme of Action not only suggests measures to improve the status of women but also to increase the involvement and participation of men in realizing gender equality, particularly in the areas of responsible parenthood, reproductive behaviour, the promotion of maternal and child health, the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, and the shared control and contribution to family income. This approach is more comprehensive and provides a better basis for attaining gender equality than the targets associated with the Millennium Declaration.

The fulfilment of the goals and objectives of the ICPD Programme of Action, says the report, would ensure the achievement of equivalent goals included in the Millennium Declaration, especially with regard to the reduction of child mortality and maternal mortality; universal access to primary education; gender parity in access to secondary education; and reductions in the spread of HIV. Furthermore, because of synergies between these goals and other development objectives, additional benefits would be reaped and are being reaped from the progress being made in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action in all its aspects.

The report will be introduced to the media by Hania Zlotnik, Director of the Population Division, at a press conference on Friday, 9 September, at 11:15 a.m., in the United Nations press briefing room S-226. In addition to its printed form, the report may also be accessed on the internet site of the Population Division (www.unpopulation.org).

(more)

For further information about the press conference or the report, please contact Ms. Zlotnik, Director, Population Division (Tel: 1-212-963-3179; e-mail: zlotnik@un.org; fax 1-212-963-2147); or Edoardo Bellando, United Nations Department of Public Information (Tel.: 1-212-963 8276; e-mail: bellando@un.org).

* * * * *