

1. Given that the Commission is the only intergovernmental forum focused on the implementation of the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in the United Nations, how can we improve its work to better assist Member States and the international community at large in advancing the ICPD agenda while contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

As per OP.23 of the UNGA resolution 49/128, the UN Commission on Population and Development (CPD) is a part of the three-tiered intergovernmental mechanism that plays the primary role in the follow-up to the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action (along with the UN General Assembly, through its role in policy formulation, and the Economic and Social Council, through its role in overall guidance and coordination). The CPD is specifically entrusted with the responsibility for reviewing the follow-up of the ICPD Programme of Action and the key actions for the further implementation, also in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (according to the ECOSOC resolutions 1995/55 and 2016/25).

Thus, the CPD has adequate mandate and terms of reference to fulfill its tasks. Its work could be further improved through better alignment with its initial core responsibility to be focused on the ICPD Programme of Action as the major consensual basis for the UN System activities in the field of competence of the Commission. Deviating from the universally agreed consensual approaches and principles of the ICPD Programme of Action, as well as the fundamental methods of work of the United Nations necessarily leads to problems in fulfilling the Commission's mandate.

The fact that the CPD failed to agree on the traditional resolutions on its special themes in 2015, 2017 and 2018, while such situation has not happened since the establishment of that practice in 2000, calls for in-depth reflection on the reasons for that by Member States. This analysis may benefit from identifying the immediate points of disagreement that led to that situation.

Recollection shows that this was due to the persistent attempts by a part of the CPD membership to include in the draft resolutions terms/concepts not in line with and stepping aside from the ICPD Programme of Action (see *e.g.* documents E/2017/25 – E/CN.9/2017/6 and E/2015/25 – E/CN.9/2015/7). Another controversial matter during the recent CPD sessions was the tendency of a part of the membership to advance the “outcomes” of the ICPD regional review conferences held in 2013 and 2018.

Interestingly, it is after the conclusion of the review process in 2014 that the current problems within the Commission seemed to become especially acute. It is well-known that some of the said regional reviews (*e.g.* in the UNECE region) did not adopt any intergovernmentally agreed outcome document, but had informal chair's

summaries that cannot be perceived as an official outcome, nor as a region-specific guidance (or, indeed, any guidance) to Member States. In other regions (*e.g.* in the ESCAP region in 2013) there was lack of consensus among Member States and the negotiations on the outcome documents ended up in a vote undermining their status. The reasons for the reservations of many countries with regard to the above-mentioned summaries and documents is that they (i) try to impose on the wider membership non-agreed terms/concepts/approaches not to be found in the ICPD Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda; and (ii) that this is done either bypassing standard intergovernmental procedures or to the detriment of consensus. Such an approach undermines one of the fundamental principles of the ICPD Programme of Action, namely that its “recommendations for action are made in a spirit of consensus and international cooperation, recognizing that the formulation and implementation of population-related policies is the responsibility of each country and should take into account the economic, social and environmental diversity of conditions in each country, with full respect for the various religious and ethical values, cultural backgrounds and philosophical convictions of its people”. That principle was time and again reaffirmed by the United Nations, including in the UNGA resolution 49/128 stating that “the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development is the sovereign right of every country, in accordance with its national laws and development priorities, with full respect for the various religious and ethical values and cultural backgrounds of its peoples and in conformity with universally recognized international human rights”. Neglecting those fundamental principles goes contrary to OP.4 of the UNGA resolution 65/234 that confirmed that “there will be no renegotiation of the existing agreements contained” in the ICPD Programme of Action.

To sum up, we believe that the CPD is well-equipped to fulfill its mandate. What is lacking is the political will within its entire membership for consensus-building based on mutually acceptable foundation of the ICPD and the 2030 Agenda. Thus, to be more effective the Commission should make a conscious and collective choice in favour of cooperation, consensus and multilateralism, rather than witnessing attempts to impose controversial notions adhered to by some but not shared by others and regardless the opinions of all.

2. Population and development issues and trends, including drivers and impacts, have important implications for the further implementation of the Programme of Action and the achievement of the SDGs. What role can the Commission play in guiding Member States and the international community in responding to these issues and trends?

The CPD already has this very role and responsibility, as clearly reflected in its terms of reference. Population and development issues and trends, including drivers and impacts, are annually analyzed in the reports by the Secretary-General to the Commission, informed by the expertise of the UNDESA, UNFPA and other relevant UN System entities, as appropriate. To better harness its important potential and fulfill its core responsibilities, the CPD should maintain its focus on promoting intergovernmental technical dialogue free from ideology-driven discourse and on consensus-building providing for evidence-based policy-making by governments at the national level, while benefitting from the existing modalities for attendance and contribution of the relevant academia and civil society organizations.

3. In order to address the above questions and issues, would it be desirable or feasible for the Commission to adjust its methods of work (organizational aspects, substantive elements, outcome)? If so, could the practices and experiences of other subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) provide any guidance?

Based on the reflections above, it does not seem that the challenges the CPD is currently facing emanate from its procedures and proven methods of work. We believe that the Commission is relevant to, well-equipped and fit for its key purpose. Moreover, it already thoroughly analyzed its methods of work in 2016. In these circumstances, an excessive emphasis on procedures, without addressing the real problem, would hardly bear good fruit to the Commission. Rather it would do otherwise by distracting its focus and much-needed effort to a never-ending reform.

While not at all opposing a better alignment of the CPD deliberations with the work of ECOSOC/HLPF, we would be cautious with regard to introducing an “emerging issue” or “review” theme alongside the CPD annual/special theme. Rather, it would seem advisable for the Commission to use to the utmost the huge potential of the special themes by mobilizing efforts to prepare an intergovernmentally agreed annual resolution (we do not favour the idea of non-negotiated chair’s summaries). Also, when this same topic was explored in 2016, it turned out that some “delegations cautioned that an agenda item on new or emerging issues could lead to a narrow focus on crisis situations or on issues deemed too controversial for consideration as a special theme” (see para 43 of document E/CN.9/2016/8).

In principle, we would not be against a combination of high-level, multi-stakeholder and expert panels at the CPD each year, which could foster the interactive segment of the sessions. However, we would not be supportive of proliferation of the number of such panels which should remain limited (maximum 1-2), as the essence of the Commission, in our opinion, is the multilateral intergovernmental dialogue and

sharing of experiences supporting evidence-based decision-making by governments at county level.

We would not support the establishment of new arrangements for promoting the regional dimension of the CPD work. The existing modalities within the Commission fully allow to explore this workstream, including through the participation in its sessions of the representatives of the UN regional commissions. Likewise, we believe that the current modalities of participation of the civil society representatives (in line with the ECOSOC rules of procedure) provide a wealth of opportunities for Member States to benefit from the vast NGO's expertise (through oral statements, written inputs and extensive reach-out activities). New arrangements to that end may lead not necessarily to increases in efficiency but rather to UN regular budget implications that in the current financial austerity environment would not be welcome.

We strongly support the retention the current consensus-based methods of adoption for the CPD draft resolutions on the annual theme and do not favour voting on selected paragraphs or resolutions as a whole. Giving up the Commission's traditional practice of seeking for agreement between its members would gravely undermine the status of its outcomes and their uptake by Member States. It could lead to contesting the CPD decisions in other UN bodies and risks to undermine the delegations' interest in this important multilateral mechanism (which would definitely not help to promote the ICPD agenda).