



CONTRIBUTION OF THE 54TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT TO THE 2021 HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

The special theme of the 54th session of the Commission on Population and Development, held from 19 to 23 April 2021, was “Population, food security, nutrition and sustainable development”. This note highlights some key findings from the session that are relevant to discussions at the High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development, to be held in July 2021. These messages are drawn from the resolution adopted by the Commission, reports of the Secretary-General prepared for the annual session, and statements made by Member States and invited speakers as well as intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

Section II: COVID-19 impact

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the SDGs under review in the 2021 HLPF from the vantage point of CPD, bearing in mind the interlinkages with other SDGs

The Commission was informed that the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic had added between 83 and 132 million to the 690 million people worldwide who were already undernourished, casting doubt on the chances of meeting global targets on food security and nutrition by 2030. Pandemic-related disruptions of food systems and livelihoods provided a stark reminder of the vast inequalities that exist around the world, especially for people affected by humanitarian crises and other vulnerable groups. The pandemic had disrupted access to school-based nutrition programmes for hundreds of millions of children.

Member States stressed the close links between gender inequality and poor access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health-care services, which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. They expressed concern about the potential negative impact of the pandemic on satisfying the unmet need for family planning, eliminating gender-based violence and ending harmful practices, including child, early and forced marriage. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on maternal, child and adolescent nutrition and the increased risk of intergenerational malnutrition was also discussed.

The COVID-19 pandemic had further deepened women and girls’ vulnerabilities, undermining their access to food and disrupting important antenatal and postnatal services, including nutrition support for pregnant and lactating women. It was recommended that Governments ensure universal access to high quality social services that allow vulnerable populations to obtain the human capital required to raise their earning potential. Women, young people and older persons should have access to land, inheritance, capital, training, services and technologies. Recognizing the steep toll that the COVID-19 pandemic had placed on national



health systems, the Commission called upon Member states to maintain the continued functioning of health systems with a view to achieving universal health coverage and ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

The Commission stressed the importance of keeping food and agriculture supply chains functioning and of supporting fishers and farmers, including smallholder small farmers, rural women and youth, and migrant and seasonal workers in agriculture and food supply chains, to continue their essential work in a safe manner. In this regard, the Commission called for providing adequate social safety nets and assistance to minimize the negative effects of loss of livelihoods and increasing food prices on food insecurity and malnutrition.

The Commission called on Member States to mitigate the effects of school closures, including on child nutrition and the return to school, which may affect girls and boys differently. Owing to prevailing social norms, adolescent girls were found to be more likely to take on unpaid care and domestic work, limiting their access to remote learning and other education support programmes, and putting them at a greater risk of harmful practices, child labour and trafficking in persons, and unintended pregnancies.

Section III: Progress and challenges

Actions, policy guidance, progress, challenges and areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the SDGs and to the HLPF theme, within the area under the purview of the CPD

The Commission reaffirmed the ICPD Programme of Action, the key actions for its further implementation and the outcomes of its reviews, while noting the outcome documents of the regional review conferences, which provided region-specific guidance on population and development. The Commission welcomed the progress made thus far towards achieving the goals and objectives of the ICPD Programme of Action, while acknowledging that considerable gaps still exist in its implementation.

Food security and nutrition are foundational to human health, wellbeing and development. The ICPD Programme of Action calls for measures to strengthen food, nutrition and agricultural policies and programmes and fair-trade relations, with special attention for strengthening food security at all levels. Food security is also at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The Commission pointed to a number of challenges for achieving the 2030 Agenda and the ICPD Programme of Action in the areas of food security, hunger and malnutrition, with substantial consequences for human health and well-being.

Food systems continue to suffer vast inequalities, as evidenced by the persistence of hunger, food insecurity, and poverty suffered by those working across the food system. Billions of people cannot afford healthy diets and struggle for decent livelihoods within and outside agriculture, and in rural and urban areas. Projections suggest that a “business-as-usual” scenario is not a viable option, as it would lead to significant undernourishment and malnutrition by 2050. Levels of undernourishment and malnutrition could increase further as a result of a deterioration in income inequality, employment, income opportunities, or access to basic services. The Commission was informed that the world was not on track to reduce overweight and obesity, or to meet the global targets on childhood stunting, exclusive breastfeeding, and low birth weight. The current global food system was found to be environmentally unsustainable, with major impacts on ecosystems, biodiversity and climate.

The Commission identified a number of risks and areas requiring attention, particularly in light of COVID-19. The pandemic was overloading already fragile health systems, reducing access to essential sexual and reproductive health-care services, including modern methods of family planning. The Commission noted with concern that the pandemic was leading to a surge in gender-based violence.

Section IV: “Ensuring that no one is left behind”

An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global, regional and national levels against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic in achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, within the respective area addressed by the CPD

Delegations emphasized that the full implementation of the Programme of Action is critical for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and called for strengthened efforts to ensure the accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the decade of action, including by building more sustainable, peaceful, just, equitable, inclusive and resilient societies where no one is left behind.

The Commission urged Member States to ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all, including women, children, adolescents and youth, older persons, indigenous peoples, local communities, rural populations and rural producers, displaced persons, refugees and migrants, the urban and rural poor, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS and those living in vulnerable situations. Those enduring humanitarian crises, the adverse effects of climate change or economic shocks should also be included in efforts to end hunger and malnutrition.

Highlighting the importance of demographic data, the Commission requested the Secretary-General to improve the accessibility and timeliness of disaggregated population data for assessing progress towards implementing the ICPD Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda.

Section V: Cooperation and partnerships

Cooperation, measures and commitments at all levels in promoting sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic

The Commission called upon Member States, the United Nations system, international and regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and academia, to strengthen solidarity and cooperation to combat the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and to intensify the contributions of all actors to the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda. In particular, the Commission called for equitable, affordable and timely access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics and health-care services, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

The Commission also welcomed the Secretary General’s initiative to convene the 2021 Food Systems Summit as part of the decade of action to achieve the SDGs and noted the upcoming Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit, to be held later in 2021.

Section VI: Policy recommendations to achieve the 2030 Agenda

Various measures and policy recommendations on building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development

The Commission encouraged Member States to take action to promote the implementation of the Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, acknowledging voluntary commitments made by Member States in this regard.

In responding to the pandemic, Member States stressed the need for strengthening social protection mechanisms, enhancing humanitarian assistance, improving national health systems and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable. Efforts to increase education, prevent child marriage, reduce adolescent pregnancy and improve nutrition and access to family planning were highlighted as essential to reduce risks to women's and children's health.

The Commission called for greater efforts to make food systems sustainable and resilient in order to achieve food security in developing countries, especially focusing on efforts to support family farming and small and medium producers. A transformation of food systems, using climate-smart and sustainable agricultural practices that promoted biodiversity, sustainable agriculture and nutrient density, was required in order to make nutritious diets available to all. As women were more likely than men to face food insecurity, achieving gender equality in policy decision-making and closing the gender gap in accessing productive resources in agriculture was considered essential.

The Commission recognized that people needed to be empowered to take responsibility for their own health, supported by public regulatory measures, and to have access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food and to enjoy diversified, balanced and healthy diets throughout their life course. The Commission placed special emphasis on the nutritional needs of pregnant and lactating women, women of reproductive age and adolescent girls, and of infants and young children, including through exclusive breastfeeding.

The Commission stressed the importance of healthy behaviours and lifestyles, including access to healthy dietary choices and school meals and regular physical activity, which can greatly reduce the risk of childhood obesity and of non-communicable diseases in adulthood.

The Commission stressed the need for social protection measures and programmes, including national safety nets, for the needy and those living in vulnerable situations and those facing discrimination, such as food and cash-for-work, direct benefit transfer, cash transfer and voucher programmes, school feeding programmes and mother-and-child nutrition programmes.