



The ICPD 'Cairo Consensus' Thirty Years On

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UN DESA Expert Group Meeting on Assessing the Status of Implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and its Contribution to the Follow-up and Review of the 2030 Agenda During the Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development

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Outline

ICPD: a critical, hard fought paradigm shift on population

How ICPD influenced policies and programs and global goals

Pivot to broader framing: human rights to reproductive justice

A world of 8 billion and infinite possibilities – what about the planet and environmental justice?

Reclaiming the Cairo Consensus

ICPD: A critical, and hard-fought paradigm shift on population

- Hard fought Cairo consensus
- Repudiated demographic targets but not population dynamics
- Narrative that Cairo is only about SRHR limits the potential for ICPD

The Cairo Consensus

- ✓ Facilitate the demographic transition
- ✓ Provide voluntary FP in the context of RH
- ✓ Improve maternal and child health outcomes
- ✓ Promote empowerment of women
- ✓ Protect Individual human rights
- ✓ Ensure broad participation in policy development, notably women and youth

International Conference on Population and Development



5-13 September 1994

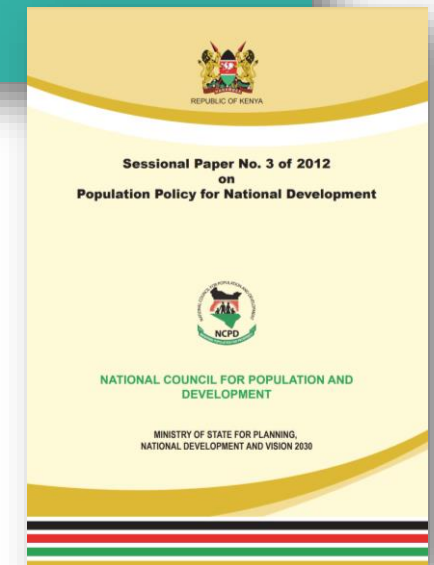
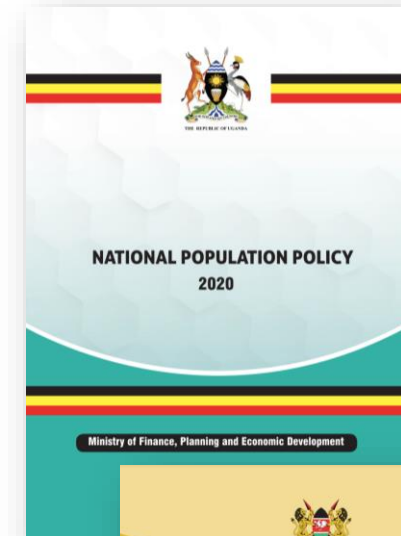
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ICPD influenced policies and programs

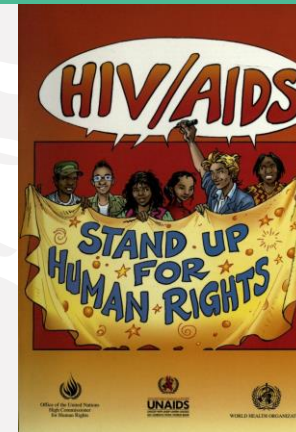
Analysis of Post-ICPD population policies from 15 African and Asian countries from 1994 to 2021:

- **ICPD paradigm shift to SRHR.** ICPD broadened scope of policies, centering reproductive health and rights and women's empowerment
- At the same time, **countries continued to focus on population and sustainable development**, including human capital, demographic dividend, urbanization/ migration, environment and (more recently) climate change
- **Population policy rationale:** to bring demographic dynamics into alignment with development, wellbeing, and resources
 - **Uganda's 2020 National Population Policy** focuses on quality of life and wellbeing, including health, education and jobs, rather than on population size or growth (Dr. Jotham Musinguzi, Director General of Uganda's National Population Council)
- **Participation in policymaking has been expanded** since ICPD, including youth
 - **Kenya** received an award during the World Health Assembly in 2013 for its participatory process of population policy development in 2012



Pivot to broader framing: human rights to reproductive justice

- ICPD forged on the bedrock of human rights; reinforced reproductive rights
- Ongoing efforts to operationalize human rights, including equity, in all aspects of SRHR programming
- Accountability mechanisms strengthened; national commitments and increased ties to local actors
- Evolving, troubling challenges for reproductive rights and efforts to control women
- Focus on the full continuum of SRH – not just abortion and contraception



Women's Rights are Human Rights



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

Pivot to broader framing: human rights to reproductive justice

Reproductive justice encompasses and extends human rights including to have or not have children and to parent one's children in safe and sustainable environments

- Shifting frames of reference to give voice and power to people rather than programs; to local over global; highlights social and community, including intergenerational, context
- Framing of sustainable environments extends beyond the health system, highlighting the importance of intersectionality and resilience
- What is a sustainable environment?
 - It includes, e.g., providing reproductive rights, equal opportunities for women, education, fair wages, housing, safety and health care.
 - What about the natural environment?
 - Do demographics play any role, e.g., in pressures on water and food security?



A world of 8 billion and infinite possibilities – what about the planet and environmental justice?

- **Population continues to be the elephant in the room** - it was contentious in Cairo, despite the 'Cairo Consensus' and remains so – resulting in unproductive silence on the issue
- **Mixed messages**
 - UNFPA 2022 SWOP
 - Cautioned against population anxiety – don't worry about either over or under population
 - UN DESA 2022:
 - **little potential for immediate impact**, but “**cumulative effect of lower fertility**, if maintained over several decades, could be a more substantial reduction of global population growth in the second half of the century.”
 - Sustained high fertility and rapid population growth present **challenges to the achievement of sustainable development.**
 - Population growth **magnifies the environmental impact of harmful economic processes.**

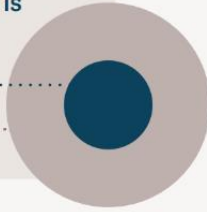
“No one doubts the value of empowering women through education, but when population grows this fast, countries are simply not able to sustain their development. And when education and health systems are overwhelmed or fail all together, I can assure you that it is women and girls who suffer first and most” (Kanyoro, 2009).

15 years after the ICPD, a Kenyan leader of a foundation population program stressed that ignoring population jeopardizes achievement of the ICPD goals

While SRHR, gender and human rights are included in global goals, attention to population dynamics is muted at best.

The population of the G5 Sahel region is expected to more than double from

85 million
to nearly **200 million.**

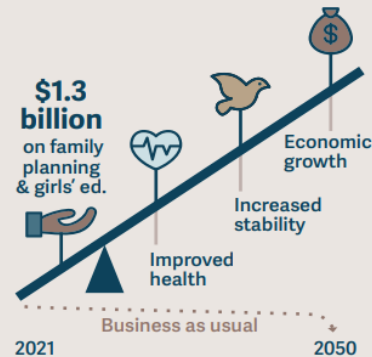


If the Sahel's population grows as projected, maintaining its current per capita GDP would require

11% annual GDP growth.

- Increasing access to FP and quality education are strategic, mutually reinforcing interventions that enhance self-determination for women and girls.
- These rights-based approaches slow population growth and help generate a "demographic dividend" that can put the Sahel on the path toward the SDG (OASIS, 2021)

Investing in family planning and girls' education is mutually reinforcing. Together they offer the best value for donors, with maximal leverage for positive outcomes in the Sahel.



Interventions aimed at influencing fertility rates, whether high or low, are never the answer because these rates are neither inherently good nor bad. With the right approach, resilient societies can thrive, whatever their fertility rate may be.

DEMOGRAPHIC RESILIENCE:



The quality or state of being able to adapt and thrive amid demographic changes.

Accept

Is this the right message for the Sahel, where fertility rates reach close to 8, the environment is fragile, and SRHR is not sufficiently funded?



Some communities are coming together – Population, Health and Environment (PHE)

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) approved a resolution in 2020 on the importance for conservation of removing barriers to voluntary, rights-based FP.



- Conservation through Public Health programming = a win-win for Mountain Gorillas and the communities around them in Uganda
- One Health Approach
 - Better human health (WASH) = better Gorilla Health; no longer “critically” endangered
 - Contraceptive use increased from 22% to 67% (higher than national average)
 - From 7 to 4 children = more opportunities for children, women and families

“I learned about [spacing children] from the gorillas – they space their children 4 to 5 years apart” Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka, award-winning wildlife vet



Reclaiming the Cairo Consensus

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- The Cairo Consensus did not dismiss ‘population’ - countries care about population; discomfort is at the global level

“It is possible to care about population dynamics ... and care about human rights at the same time” (Newman et al., 2014)

- Highlight – and celebrate – the cascading benefits of universal access to SRHR, including contraception, for women, families, communities, nations and the planet, now and in the future

“When people everywhere can exercise bodily autonomy about whether and with whom to have sex, exert control over their fertility through the realization of universal access to SRHR, and ensure all births are planned, the end result of slower population growth can contribute to a long-term reduction in global emissions through global demographic shifts. Disparaging contraception and family planning run counter to achieving universal access to SRHR.” (Members of PHE Policy and Practice Group, 2023)

- Supporting reproductive rights and justice – including fully funding programming to attain universal access to SRHR, environmental justice, and intergenerational justice, all fit within the Cairo Consensus



Thank you

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