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DRAFT WORLD POPULATION PLAN OF ACTION

Comments and suggestions by the International Forum
on the Role of Women in Population and Development

(25 February-1 March 1974)

GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT WORLD POPULATION
PLAN OF ACTION (E/CN.9/292/Rev.1)

1. The Forum made the following general comments on the draft World Population Plan of Action as a whole, bearing in mind that States have a sovereign right to formulate and promote their own population policies, with due regard to the principle that the size of the family should be the free choice of each individual:

(a) The draft Plan places too great an emphasis on the reduction of population growth and not enough on other variables, which have crucial interrelationships with population. It gives the impression that the most urgent problem of population is that of limiting growth, and does not stress sufficiently the quality of population, and the fact that for some countries, overpopulation is not, and will not be, a serious problem for some time to come;

(b) The Plan should make clear throughout that family planning should be interpreted to mean not merely birth control, but also child spacing and the means of relating family size by choice, to the benefits of family health, welfare and resources within particular cultural situations. This positive emphasis should be implicit in all discussions of population structure and change;

(c) The Plan should emphasize that the unwanted child is the principal victim of irresponsible parenthood;

(d) Although overpopulation is not a serious problem for some countries the relationship between family planning, the status of women and development is relevant for all countries;

(e) While the draft Plan refers by implication to the status and roles of women in population dynamics, it does not adequately and explicitly recognize that relationship, nor propose actions to improve the condition of women as part of an approach to the solution of population problems;

(f) Among other issues not adequately emphasized are: the need for balanced rural transformation without diminishing the need for labour in rural industries; development of leadership at the local level; policies aiming at full employment based on imaginative mobilization of human resources; dispersal of industries; more extended programmes for urban slum dwellers; and concern for the problems of migrant workers and their wives and families;

(g) The draft Plan should highlight not only demographic factors, but also the dynamics of population in their relationships with ecological questions, natural, human, and economic resources, and economic and social development of society as a basis for the solution of population questions;

(h) While Governments have the sovereign right to pursue their own population policies, population matters in one country are interdependent with those of other countries in the global context. Governments should be aware of this, and have continuous dialogues between Governments concerning population matters on a global level;

(i) The draft Plan should be reorganized and written in a style and language directed to political leaders and Government officials who will have the responsibility for implementing it, rather than demographers.

COMMENTS ON THE FOREWORD TO THE DRAFT PLAN

2. The Forum considered that in the Foreword which briefly describes present global demographic factors, several crucial points are omitted:

(a) Among the several international strategies, the Programme of Concerted International Action for the Advancement of Women (General Assembly resolution 2716 (XXV)) refers directly to questions concerning the integration of women in development and population and fertility and should be mentioned;

(b) The vicious circle of low educational and employment status of women and high fertility has been documented in the Special Rapporteur's report on the Status of Women and Family Planning (E/CN.6/575 and Add.1-3). Lack of education and adequate employment opportunities for women frequently result in high fertility, and high fertility in turn often limits education and job opportunities;

(c) High fertility and high infant mortality also create a further vicious circle in which frequent births lead to high infant mortality and high infant mortality in turn encourages more frequent births;

(d) To interrupt these cycles, millions of women urgently need better education, economic opportunities, greater knowledge of, and access to, family planning, more health and nutrition services, and support from families, communities, and Governments. Health, education and all other social services must become involved;

(e) This massive task will require the support of Governments of both developed and developing countries, international agencies, and non-governmental organizations. It will require a greater sharing of total world resources. Funds should be diverted from armaments and conflict as well as from wasteful or extravagant consumption to mobilize world support on the scale required to meet this urgent need for improved family welfare;

(f) To maintain the goal of balanced human development, the United Nations must remain vigilant in crisis situations (such as population, energy, or food supply) to ensure that nations (and even the United Nations itself) are not exploited by power groups.

I. PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES

3. The Forum suggested that:

(a) It should be explicitly stated among the principles that discrimination on grounds of sex (as well as racial discrimination and the threat of mass destruction) is incompatible with development;

(b) Other factors should also be mentioned among the principles, such as national sovereignty, reduction in international tensions and decreases in expenditure on armaments, proper use of resources, individual liberty, especially with respect to freedom of expression, association and movement, equality of opportunity for men and women;

(c) Among the objectives mention should be made of the advancement of national and international understanding of the interrelationship of the condition of women, family size and demographic behaviour;

(d) Specific objectives should include: the advancement of women and expansion of their roles; the full participation of women in the formulation and implementation of population policies; the creation of awareness among all women of their current and potential roles in national life;

(e) The aim of the population programme should be the quality of life of the future generation rather than control itself.

II. POPULATION GOALS AND POLICIES

4. The Forum considered that in its concern with goals and policies aimed at affecting population the draft Plan omits reference to many factors which have

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a crucial interrelation with population. While many of these may form parts of national and international strategies for promoting economic and social well-being they have a rightful place among population goals and recommendations. Greater attention needs to be given in the draft Plan to integrating these strategies in order to achieve population goals.

5. The Plan should recognize the importance of goals and policies affecting the situation and roles of women as crucial determinants of population trends. Among those requiring specific mention are the following:

(a) National development plans and programmes should include the promotion of opportunities for the employment of women in all existing fields, with equal pay for equal work and, where appropriate, the formation of new industries and services to encourage women to enter the labour force and overcome prejudices against their participation. Such programmes could include the promotion and support of small-scale, labour-intensive rural industries. Child care and family planning services should be offered in conjunction with these new employment opportunities to ensure that all women are able to benefit from them. Special consideration should also be given to policies aimed at improving the condition of life of rural women by the use of simple, inexpensive, local systems;

(b) The choice of roles for women beyond marriage and motherhood which could also provide them with a source of livelihood as well as social and economic well-being should be emphasized;

(c) With regard to internal and international migration, particular account should be taken of the special hardships faced by women who are left behind in the countryside, by women who migrate alone to the cities and are excluded more frequently than men from education and employment, especially when urban employment is high; the problems of wives and families of migrants should also be fully recognized and policies developed to cope with them. In addition the problems of wives who are often obliged to choose between following the place of their husband's work and giving up their own employment or separating their families must also be taken into account;

(d) There is need for education on the basic facts and implications of population phenomena and for making a clear distinction between family planning and birth control. It is important that sex and family life and education be included in school curricula, but because of the high drop-out rate from school in some parts of the world out-of-school education should be encouraged;

(e) It is essential to improve the conditions in rural areas and create adequate employment opportunities in rural areas, rather than "increase the absorption capacity of urban centres". It is essential to encourage the decentralization of agricultural and other industries for the development of smaller villages and towns in order to encourage more job opportunities, educational facilities and community services.

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III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PROMOTION OF KNOWLEDGE AND POLICIES

6. The Forum recommended that women and youth should be encouraged to participate fully in the development and dissemination of knowledge and in decision-making and implementation of policies relevant to population.

7. Data collection should include statistics on the economic and social roles of men and women, which can serve as indicators of the relative status of men and women. Such data, which should be available to the public and interested groups as well as government policy-making bodies, should be used to evaluate regularly and systematically the progress made in achieving equality between men and women. Further research on law and population is needed.

8. Education and training, for both men and women, is a long-term process essential to widespread understanding of population issues and deserves high priority. Training in family planning methods should be provided to health and welfare personnel to suit local conditions and should be directed to both men and women.

9. Education in all levels and forms - vocational, professional, formal, informal; local, regional, or international - should be equally open to both sexes and should avoid sex biases in directing children or other persons toward careers. Mass media should depict opportunities and roles for women which encourage achievement and community service and do not denigrate women's capabilities. Educated women in turn have a responsibility in eliminating female illiteracy and in encouraging other women to continue education or training to enable them to make a still greater contribution to family and national welfare.

10. Governmental and non-governmental organizations should be encouraged to support and undertake communication and research to implement action programmes (a) to eradicate sex-role stereotyping; (b) to increase understanding of the changing roles of women and the contributions their talents and capabilities can make to improve the quality of life for all; and (c) to use the power of mass media to effect the necessary legislative and cultural changes.

11. Among the areas of research the following should be added: (a) further study of the interrelationship between the status of women, fertility, and other aspects of development; and (b) further research on the effects of oral contraceptives on women's health as well as on the health of future babies.

IV. ROLE OF NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

12. Since the laws enacted by national Governments and the extent of their de facto implementation influence population, development, and the status of women, each Government should review and appraise all national legislation relating to fertility and the status of women to ensure that human rights and national population policies are taken into full account. The rights of men and women in family law should be equalized. The effects of specific legislation on fertility should be reviewed and evaluated and model laws developed to meet national or regional needs, taking into account the right of couples to decide on the number and spacing of their children.

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13. National legislation having a bearing on the status of women and family planning programmes should be reviewed to ensure compliance with relevant international instruments and in particular laws concerning age at marriage, inheritance, property rights of married women, divorce, education, employment and the rights of the child.

14. Specific policies need to be established to enhance the viability of the various laws in effect in order to reduce the frequently wide discrepancy between legislative requirements and de facto conditions.

15. Women should be assured full participation in decision-making particularly in legislative and executive branches of government and implementation of national laws and policies affecting population.

16. Technical assistance experts should be well informed and trained in local needs and conditions. Care should be taken in selecting experts and special attention paid to finding competent women.

17. In order to encourage developed countries to give more tangible and meaningful assistance to developing countries the Forum should consider meeting on a regional basis to establish a regional community of interests.

V. MONITORING, REVIEW AND APPRAISAL

18. Governments should devise their own national versions of the World Population Plan of Action, setting targets for all sectors including those specifically concerned with women. Progress would be reported to the United Nations. United Nations should release semi-annually reports evaluating progress and achievements in respect to goals of the national plans. The endeavour should constitute an activity within the United Nations Second Development Decade. The social aspect of development should be given importance equal with the economic aspects.

19. Progress towards achieving legal, social and economic equality in the status of women and men should be evaluated as a significant factor in population changes and in the achievement of the goals of this Plan.

20. Qualified women should be recruited and women's organizations utilized to provide technical assistance in population fields and to participate in international reviews and appraisals.
