

The Evaluation of Cairo+10 in the Mediterranean Region

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On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the approval of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which took place in Cairo in 1994, the majority of the 179 countries which reached the historic consensus to improve the quality of life of millions of men and women have carried out the corresponding work on assessing the progress made. Half-way towards finalising the Programme of Action, which will coincide with the goal for 2015 of the Millennium Development Goals, the assessment made in 2004 under the remit of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), a great defender of the Cairo agenda, will have been a good moment to report the advances made specifically in the Mediterranean area. Nevertheless, not all Mediterranean countries have made the effort to respond to the progress inspection requested; – this is why it is perhaps the region of the world that has contributed least to the assessment of Cairo+10. In fact, only 75% of the Arab countries have replied to the field inquiry sent by the UNFPA in 2003, whereas other regions such as Latin America, the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa have responded 100%. This combined with the almost non-existent response from the southern European countries, with the absence of France, Italy, Greece, Slovenia, Cyprus and Malta limiting this assessment.

Furthermore, it should be stressed that this assessment of Cairo+10, in reference to the Mediterranean countries, is not

made on the part of the United Nations system as a whole. To be able to analyse the advances and difficulties according to population and development it becomes necessary to confront two distinct processes which are carried out separately, basically because the contexts are hardly comparable. On one hand is the process of the European region (which includes North America and Central Asia), carried out at the European Population Forum in Geneva in January 2004 and on the other is the Arab Population Forum, which took place in Beirut in November 2004 and which includes all Arab countries, not just those on the Mediterranean. In both Forums the results of the field inquiries that the UNFPA carried out throughout 2003 were presented with the intention of observing the achievement of the ICPD Programme of Action.

Given the poor response of the Mediterranean European countries obtained at the European Population Forum in Geneva, of which the advances made in coverage of health services and good practice in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkey could be emphasised, only the results obtained at the Arab Forum were mentioned.

The Arab Population Forum: From Cairo 1994 to Beirut 2004

The Arab Population Forum took place on 19th to 21st November 2004 and assessed the achievements of the States of the region and the challenges to be faced in the field of population and development. Organised by UNFPA, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the League of Arab States, the forum served to review

the principal themes of population and development over the previous decade and their future perspectives, including tendencies and structural changes to the population in the Arab region and the main challenges and political solutions which arise from these changes. The regional analysis of the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action was also presented. The areas tackled were the relationship between population, poverty and gender, the situation of health and reproductive rights, with particular emphasis on maternal morbidity and mortality, the barriers against the application of reproductive rights and gender equality, the opportunities and challenges for young people in their cultural, economic and social dimensions, as well as the position of the demographic transition process of these countries. Furthermore, the forum discussed potential sources of support and partnership, including the mobilisation of financial resources and the participation, transfer and use of information and communication knowledge and technology. With respect to the central axes of the forum, as regards population and development a general view of the political and programmatic solutions of the Arab countries was given, covering the tendencies in key operative themes at a national and regional level, including the mobilisation of financial resources and the participation, transfer and use of information and communication knowledge and technology. In addition, the debates concentrated on the potential role of private sector initiatives. The relationship between population, poverty and gender was also dealt with, emphasising that globalisation, uncertain economies, poor governing and war have exacerbated insecurity and mobility of the

population in the Arab region and have affected the securing of basic rights of survival, freedom of thought and intellectual advancement. Around 22% of the population of the region currently live on less than one dollar a day and 52% survive on 2-5 dollars a day. This poverty is highly correlated with the parameters of population and reproductive health of the region, including elevated birth rate,

high morbidity and mortality, early marriage age, low use of contraceptives, a high ratio of dependency, large family size, low female education and a predominance of homes headed by women in the communities. The nature and magnitude of the causalities between population, poverty and gender were defined and new elements for keeping poverty in check by improving reproductive health

and promoting the rights, awareness raising, access to quality services and empowerment of women were identified. The empirical evidence and qualitative parameters that were presented permit analytical support to the theory that poverty, composed of social and cultural values, can be beaten by empowering women and promoting reproductive rights and governance.

CULTURE MATTERS. AN INITIATIVE FOR THE INTEGRATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN CO-OPERATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

A general consensus already exists that international co-operation for development is in need of profound reforms in terms of quantity and quality. After more than half a century of experience, the flow of resources being mobilised is very much insufficient, programming strategies have become steadily more inefficient and, as a consequence of this, the results obtained are on the whole somewhat lacking in relation to the needs of today's world. Although the reform debate remains open, all actors (Governments, bilateral and multilateral agencies, as well as civil society organisations) seem to at least be in agreement on the fact that a conceptual renovation is needed and, at the same time, changes in cooperation strategies and practices.

In a search for this renewed agenda of international co-operation, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for 2015 promoted by the United Nations play a central role as they represent a test to measure the degree of political willingness and moral responsibility of Member States as well as the civil society of all countries, with the aim of meeting commitments and achieving the goals agreed upon.

As well as political willingness and resources, to turn the MDGs into reality, it is essential to understand that the relationship between the promotion of universal human rights and the preservation of cultural diversity is not a contradictory process that necessarily leads to a zero-sum outcome. In reality this is an interactive and synergistic process, where both sides of the equation mutually reinforce each other. If we understand development as freedom – that is to say, the personal capacity to have options in life and the power to choose, then multicultural public policies which recognise differences, defend diversity and promote cultural freedoms are needed, so that democratic rights and social equity are fully realised. Definitively, culture matters.

This inclusive approach, which incorporates the cultural dimension to co-operation for development, has been manifested in an initiative by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), backed by the Netherlands with the support of a group of countries from the European Union. The launch of this initiative took place in Amsterdam on 8th March 2004, with the organisation of an international forum in which representatives from United Nations agencies, governments, aid agencies and civil society organisations from all over the world participated.

The title of the forum, *Cairo and Beyond: Reproductive Rights and Culture*, highlights the innovative nature and scope of the initiative which explicitly sets out the relationship between rights and culture.

The main conclusion of the forum is that human rights cannot be transplanted as external principles onto people or their communities but that, in fact, have to be understood and taken on from their own cultural coordinates. But it is also therefore recognised that there cannot be areas exempt from the validity of human rights, according to the particular traditions or particular values of a country. It is precisely through an interactive approach that these tensions can be best dealt with, as the use of the cultural prism permits those responsible for public policies to understand the context in which the co-operation programmes have to be implemented.

There is certainly no other region like the Mediterranean where the suppositions and objectives of the Amsterdam Forum fit better. Great cultural diversity alongside growing interaction between its peoples, constitute a rich laboratory of experiences to put Euro-Mediterranean relationships to the test from a renewed vision of international co-operation.

All developing countries on the Mediterranean basin, from the Maghreb and the Middle East

to the Balkans, face a strategic challenge to meet the MDGs. They all also have co-operation programmes in progress regarding population, in some cases with obvious advances in the reduction of infant and maternal mortality and unwanted fertility, but in many countries are still significantly behind in fully guaranteeing women's rights, especially in relation to sex education and reproductive health.

The growing feminisation of migration and the processes of family regrouping extend this challenge to the receiving European countries themselves and especially the host communities. This opens up a previously unseen perspective of cooperation on both sides of the migratory process, where the cultural dimension plays a key role. It will be necessary to contribute with more and better quality cooperation in the countries of origin in order to meet the MDGs. The main challenge for the destination countries is to design and implement an entire series of new generation public policies, above all at municipal level, which takes into account the multicultural nature of their populations at the initial stages of integration.

Given its position as a North-South border country and its new commitment to multilateralism, a clear opportunity exists for Spain to be incorporated and, in its case, to lead this initiative to integrate human rights and cultural diversity in co-operation for development, as promoted by the Amsterdam Forum. The ideal occasion could be the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the Barcelona Process and the construction of a renewed European Union agenda for the Mediterranean.

Further information:
www.reproductiverightsandculture.org

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As regards reproductive health and rights, it was stated that significant progress has been made. Nevertheless, certain factors hinder the capacity of women and men to fully enjoy their reproductive rights and protect their reproductive health. These factors, which include poverty, gender inequality and lack of access to basic social services, can lead to unwanted pregnancies, gender-based violence and growing risks of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, these factors are aggravated by sociocultural barriers, including discriminatory practices against women and girls, such as early or enforced marriage, limited education of girls and violence and crimes committed against women in the name of honour. The forum paid special attention to the opportunities and challenges of youth. Young people are the most rapidly growing population group in the Arab region, representing between a third and half of the national populations according to the country. This wide and rapid increase in population is already having a substantial impact on all facets of life in the region. Whilst these young people are typically more educated and enjoy better access to knowledge, technology and resources than other age groups, a number of challenges and growing sources of risk exist which impede their development. The risks highlighted are growing poverty, unemployment and underemployment, decreasing quality of education and skills development, worsening living conditions, less community support, which can lead to emo-

tional anxiety, violence and abuse, increase in risk of exposure to illnesses and infections, particularly STDs and HIV/AIDS, incidence of gender-based violence, and issues related to fertility rate, unwanted pregnancies and premature marriage.

Finally, the demographic situation of the Arab countries was dealt with. Some Arab countries have completed their demographic transition whilst others are experiencing a situation where birth rates are still comparatively high. From a socioeconomic and development perspective, the forthcoming decades will be characterised by a greater percentage of population of active age, bringing opportunities for investment in human development and economic policies, but also heavy loads in the form of a growing number of older people in need of social security, pensions and health care. The necessity to maximise the gains in the demographic transition from high to low mortality and fertility rates was examined – this is labelled the *demographic dividend*. Numerous studies of success stories were also highlighted to stress the benefits that can be reaped by investing in reproductive health and rights, gender equality and empowerment of women.

The forum concluded its work with the Beirut Declaration of 2004, which reasserts the commitment of the region to the ICPD Programme of Action. The Beirut Declaration expresses appreciation of the efforts of the UNFPA, the Arab League and the ESCWA in their support of the implementation of the pro-

gramme of action. A call is made to the Arab governments to set in motion population policies and human development strategies and develop independent sources to finance these efforts. The declaration also invites the civil society and governments to cooperate more closely, transparently and democratically, in order to create a favourable environment for partnership in the field of population and development. It underlines the importance of giving absolute priority to youth, supporting programmes destined to pay attention to their needs, improving their quality of life and opening perspectives for their effective participation. The Beirut Declaration also expresses the importance of translating the recommendations of the forum into commitments through new programmes and projects. It emphasises the importance of diversifying sources of financing to include national, regional and international sources. The need of countries and donor institutions to face up to their ICPD commitments is underlined (particularly quoting the figure of 3 billion dollars at the end of 2005). The Beirut Declaration 2004 ends by declaring the intention of the participants to continue working for the full realisation of the ICPD objectives and millennium development goals, with the conviction that the achievement of the ICPD Programme of Action serves as a base for achieving the millennium goals and other development goals, which will bring about economic prosperity and social wellbeing for Arab peoples.