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Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

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Regional Seminar "Key advances and actions for the implementation  
of the Cairo Programme of Action, 15 years after its adoption"

7 - 8 October 2009

**CARIBBEAN SUBREGIONAL MEETING TO ASSESS THE IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT (ICPD)  
15 YEARS AFTER ITS ADOPTION**

**CONCLUSIONS**

This document contains the conclusions of the Caribbean subregional meeting to assess the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) 15 years after its adoption, took place in St John's, Antigua and Barbuda, on the 20 and 21 August 2009.

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## CONCLUSIONS

As part of the activities to commemorate the 15th anniversary of ICPD, ECLAC in collaboration with UNFPA, organized a Subregional Expert Meeting to assess the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Antigua and Barbuda, 20-21 August 2009.

This meeting involved the participation of government representatives of fifteen Caribbean countries and a number of NGOs and experts in the areas of Population and Development, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and Gender. The objective of this meeting was to discuss achievements, challenges and gaps experienced in the implementation of the Programme of Action resulting from the ICPD and the way forward.

### **Context**

In the English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean subregion, population growth has effectively declined and fertility rates are now around replacement levels while life expectancy is relatively high. The interaction between population and development has led to the improvement of the lives of millions in the Caribbean subregion.

With the majority of the countries being classified as high-income economies and nearly all of the rest as middle income, the region is one of the more developed in the world. Abject poverty is not a wide spread phenomenon in the Caribbean, however, pockets of poverty still exist. Current accurate data on poverty in the region are not readily available or accessible and where data are available, it is not comparable between countries due to the fact that the method of measuring poverty data is not unambiguous. In spite of being middle and high income countries, Caribbean countries are highly vulnerable due to huge debt burdens and high exposure to natural hazards, limited natural resources, limited economic diversification and challenges with institutional capacities. These and other factors keep the Caribbean vulnerable to poverty unless measures are put in place to enhance resilience in these areas.

Most countries in the region are still in a particularly favourable period for development in which the working-age population increases relative to the population of economically dependent ages. However, the benefits of this situation are not automatic; we need to continue to invest in youth development. Soon, this equation will be reversed as the share of older persons steadily increases, and the Caribbean society will have to face the challenges related to population ageing.

Current trends and the negative effects of the global financial and economic crisis, may present countries with additional challenges of achieving the agreed goals and commitments of the Programme of Action of the ICPD, as well as most of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Indeed, there is a risk that some of the development gains in the region may be reversed due to external effects.

### **Achievements**

The English and Dutch Speaking Caribbean countries have made significant progress in achieving economic and human development. Most governments have put in place programmes and policies on social protection to address the needs of the most vulnerable populations, such as children and youth, women, the elderly, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV and their families. However, the sustainability of such programmes could be jeopardized as a result of the global financial crisis.

In the area of population and development, many countries in the region have made efforts to integrate population issues in planning and development frameworks and strategies. Concerning the issue of migration, several countries have taken steps to include this issue in development planning and have made efforts toward the formulation of migration policies to manage its impact. Intra-regional migration measures are being taken to address and manage this issue, particularly as it relates to movement of skilled labour in the region.

In the Caribbean, there is a general acknowledgment of the importance of addressing the challenges posed

by an increasingly ageing population. All governments have developed programmes and interventions for social protection of older persons.

In regards to data, efforts have been made to increase the capacity for the collection and analysis of high quality data, particularly population and housing census data, through training, capacity building and south-south cooperation. Another area that has seen advancement is the harmonization and standardization of definitions and methodologies concerning census data within the context of the 2010 Round of Census.

Most countries in the region have met or surpassed the targets for universal primary education and have introduced with the support of CARICOM the comprehensive health and family life education (HFLE) curriculum at most educational levels including out-of-school youth. In the Caribbean family planning services are highly developed. Emergency contraception is provided by all Family Planning Associations in the Caribbean region. In the area of HIV and AIDS, national efforts to scale-up HIV prevention are being undertaken and access to antiretroviral drugs is widely available in all countries at limited or no cost. Advancements have been made in reducing mother to child transmission of HIV and the use of male and female condoms have increased.

Gender machineries have also been put in place in nearly all countries in the region. In all Caribbean countries there are criminal sanctions for sexual offences and rape, indecent assault, trafficking and abduction of women. Legal frameworks in these countries provide civil and penal measures for cases of assault and therefore gender-based violence, including speedy actions to injunctions and protection orders. Some countries have introduced specific legislation on gender-based violence. Nevertheless, violence against women and girls continues to be pervasive in these countries, particularly sexual violence. Taking into account the needs of the persons and families, some countries are also advancing measures that seek to combine productive and reproductive life by providing increased maternity and paternity leave, flexible time arrangements and child care facilities.

### **Challenges and opportunities**

Although short-term policy measures are needed to deal with the international economic crisis, governments should avoid reducing social expenditures and not lose sight of the long-term vision for development planning. In this context, it is critical to maintain and reinforce political commitment to the goals of ICPD, as well as to provide adequate financial support to maintain required levels of implementation.

Most Caribbean countries can still reap the benefits of the demographic dividend to properly prepare for the challenges of investing in youth and responding to the needs of an ageing society. Addressing unemployment among youth, extending the coverage and quality of secondary and tertiary education and promoting youth participation in country-led processes are key needs to be addressed. There is a trend of underachievement of boys in the education sector that is of concern to countries. Related to this is the role of men as parents and role models in public and private spheres

Countries also face the challenge of providing adequate social provisions for older persons in the context of enhanced demand for long-term care, particularly for poor women. This will require the strengthening of inter-generational solidarity mechanisms. It is important that Caribbean governments follow the recommendations of the Brasilia Declaration, including the development of an International Convention for the Protection of the Rights of Older Persons.

A significant part of the population in the Caribbean is living with disabilities. The physical infrastructure is far behind levels necessary to guarantee equal participation in all aspects of social, economic and cultural life. Increased investments are needed in order to create conditions that permit self-reliance and dignity for persons with disability.

The Caribbean population is among the most mobile in the world and the issue of the brain drain in the areas of health and education is one of the main challenges. Efforts should be made to create opportunities to encourage skilled workers, particularly among the youth to remain in the region. If not properly addressed, the brain drain of skilled health workers could undermine the attainment of the health-related MDGs. The human rights of undocumented migrants are also an area of concern as is the capacity of some receiving countries to properly plan and to provide adequate social protection to this group. Caribbean

countries are encouraged to ratify the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Although progress has been made in implementing measures against international trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced domestic servitude, much more efforts are needed.

In recognition of the new MDG target to achieve universal access to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services by 2015 Caribbean countries should seek to promote the linkages between reproductive health and HIV services and programmes and make them available to the most vulnerable populations. This will increase the overall effectiveness and quality of culturally-sensitive services in meeting the sexual and reproductive needs, of the population, including those of persons with disabilities, devoid of stigma and discrimination.

In the last two decades, improvements in reducing maternal mortality, and in some countries additionally in infant and child mortality, have stagnated. It is recognized that there is a need to better understand the factors behind this situation. This should include an assessment of the improvement of the quality of antenatal and emergency obstetric care in hospitals. An increased access to reproductive health services for rural, hinterland and other marginalized populations through rights-based and culturally sensitive approaches should be prioritized.

The Caribbean has the largest generation of adolescents ever in history. Recognizing this, the region should prepare to meet the SRH needs of this group. There continues to be a disconnect between the age of marriage and the age of consent in many countries which inhibit access to SRH services and commodities by young people. There is a general recognition that young people are engaged in sexual activity at an early age and there is need to protect them against early unplanned pregnancy and HIV infection. This should be addressed in the context of social protection and young people's access to education, employment and participation.

In this context, adolescent and teenage pregnancy remains a critical challenge in the region. The socio-economic impact of the high level of adolescent motherhood contributes to the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Adolescent fertility also impacts the opportunities of girls and women to advance in the education and employment sectors. To tackle this issue a series of measures should be considered: understanding the cultural determinants of sexual initiation and early motherhood; encouraging the full implementation of comprehensive sexuality education (HFLE) in schools; promoting access to SRH information, counselling, services; including commodities for sexually active adolescents and youth; and preventing all forms of pressure and sexual abuse and exploitation.

Despite the advancements made in HIV and AIDS, some key challenges still exist: HIV prevention programmes are still not always reaching vulnerable groups with HIV education, Behavioural Change Communication (BCC), testing and counselling and post-exposure prophylaxis, and the linkage of HIV programmes with SRH services, is still not mainstreamed in several countries. Stigma and discrimination remains widespread and impacts the access to follow-up prevention, treatment, care and support services for People Living with HIV and AIDS (PLHIV) and the recognition of the rights of PLHIV to access SRH services. Gender inequalities manifest themselves in terms of feminization of poverty, vulnerability to HIV and AIDS, and gender-based violence.

In the area of gender equality, most countries have enacted legislation and ratified key international conventions. Despite this, under-resourcing of gender equality programmes is a significant problem. Women continue to be under-represented in governance and political structures at decision-making levels across the Caribbean. The recent launch of the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership (CIWIL) will hopefully address this challenge. Political and financial support should be provided to this initiative. Sexual assault rates remain high and while legal frameworks exists to respond to these violations, challenges remain in the enforcement of legislation. The burden of family care is highly feminized as women remain the primary caretakers of children and other dependants including the elderly. Single women-headed households account for approximately half of all households in many parts of the Caribbean. Most of these households are more vulnerable to poverty than other households.

Ensuring the consistent availability of data is a challenge faced by countries in the region. Statistics related to migration and disability are even largely absent. This has a direct impact on evidenced-based planning and development efforts. In order to adequately address the socio-economic and socio-demographic

challenges stated above, it is very important to have accurate and timely data of good quality with proper metadata available. This is important in order to not only understand the magnitude and dynamics of the variable but also to have appropriate evidence based decision making processes, including for the development of policies and programmes to improve the quality of the life for all. In this regard, there is a need to produce timely and good quality census results, avoiding the situation faced during the previous census round. Likewise, improving existing registers and their use is important. Increasing the analytical capacities and strengthening the coordination and communication between the various ministries, government agencies and the civil society is essential in this process.

It should be recognized that the full implementation of the Programme of Action of the ICPD and the key actions for its further implementation are integrally linked to global efforts to eradicate poverty and to achieve sustainable development. Population dynamics are thus important factors in development and in our efforts to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs as these goals are mutually reinforcing. Therefore increasing financial efforts to implement ICPD Programme of Action should be considered as a key contribution to the life and the human rights of the people, as well a smart investment with high economic and social returns.

### **The way forward: towards 2014 and beyond**

The serious impact of the economic and financial crisis together with the five year countdown towards 2014, present the need for an Urgent Call for Action if the goals of the ICPD Programme of Action and the MDGs are to be met. More than ever, the MDGs will not be achieved unless more progress is made to guarantee universal access to reproductive health by 2015.

In this light, consolidation of achievements is imperative. Too much is at stake for the Caribbean people to allow gains to be lost. Also, the critical human rights and development challenges that governments have together identified during these two days of deliberation call for the prioritization of actions with the establishment of clear results and with identifiable targets.

The Caribbean subregion is in a singular position to call for the definition of a five year strategy with country-led and sub regional mechanisms for assessing progress and correcting actions. A strong partnership of governments, parliamentarians, civil society organizations should jointly with development agencies, join efforts to achieve further progress in the period ahead. Prioritization in key challenges identified in this meeting is a must. The identification of lessons learned and best practices can spearhead knowledge sharing initiatives through south-south collaboration among countries and other knowledge sharing practices can be put in motion.

Given the fact that the priorities here identified will be relevant in the decades to come, Governments in the sub region should ratify their commitment to carry the ICPD agenda forward, beyond 2014. A process of reflection will concomitantly need to take place in order to prepare the follow up agenda of ICPD for the Caribbean people.

The UNFPA Subregional Office of the English and Dutch speaking Caribbean, with the assistance of the Caribbean subregional headquarters of ECLAC, stands ready to use all its resources, human/technical and financial to give support to Governments and civil society in support of this endeavour.