

**REPORT****REGIONAL ARAB POPULATION FORUM
BEIRUT, 19-21 NOVEMBER 2004****Summary**

The Regional Arab Population Forum was held in Beirut from 19 to 21 November 2004 in order to mark the tenth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which was held in Cairo from 5 to 13 September 1994. This report contains a brief summary of its organizational aspects and a resume of the most important research and reports that were discussed at the Forum and the recommendations made.

In addition to evaluating achievements, discussions focused on a number of emerging population-related issues, including trends and changes in the population structure of the Arab countries, the major challenges, and concomitant policy responses arising from those changes.

At the conclusion of the Forum, participants adopted the 2004 Beirut Declaration, in which they renewed their commitment to implement the ICPD Programme of Action and United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in the light of the reports that were presented at the Forum and of the current needs of the Arab region. Participants called upon Arab countries to activate population policies, integrate them into sustainable development plans and provide the necessary resources for their implementation. They also urged all parties involved in population and development in the Arab world to strengthen partnership between the public sectors and civil society institutions, in a climate of transparency and democracy.

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the League of Arab States (LAS) organized the Regional Arab Population Forum (APF), which was held in Beirut from 19 to 21 November 2004. The forum marked the tenth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which was held in Cairo from 5 to 13 September 1994 and aimed to achieve the following:

(a) Assess achievements in the Arab region with regard to the implementation of regional and global agreements, pursuing to the ICPD Programme of Action;

(b) Enable stock to be taken of lessons learned and best practices that could be replicated in other countries in the region;

(c) Further accelerate implementation of such agreements;

(d) Offer a multifaceted perspective in the areas of population, poverty, development and youth, and analyse such prevailing challenges as high mortality, reproductive health morbidity and barriers to the enforcement of reproductive rights and gender equality;

(e) Assess potential sources of support and partnership, including the mobilization of financial resources and the participation, transfer and use of knowledge and information and communication technology (ICT).

I. OUTCOMES OF THE FORUM

2. The Regional Arab Population Forum concluded its work with the adoption of the 2004 Beirut Declaration, which consists of a set of principles and undertakings that comprise the general framework for a set of recommendations which participants agreed that each country had the sovereign right to implement in accordance with development priorities, laws in force and the values and culture of the Arab peoples, in the context of recognized human rights. Participants also acknowledged the outstanding endeavours that are being exerted in the Arab region in that respect. Set forth below is the text of the Declaration and recommendations.

A. THE BEIRUT DECLARATION OF THE REGIONAL ARAB POPULATION FORUM

1. We, the participants at the Regional Arab Population Forum, met at United Nations House, Beirut, from 19 to 21 November 2004, in order to mark the passage of 10 years since the International Conference on Population and Development was held in Cairo in 1994, reaffirm the importance of following up the progress made in the field of population and development in the past decade and identify goals for the forthcoming decade.

2. We affirm our belief in the importance of following up the progress made in the past decade with respect to the 1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development; other documents issued by review and evaluation conferences; regional and international intergovernmental conferences on population and development; resolutions adopted by national population committees and councils; and the relevant international, regional and local declarations; and in the importance of identifying goals and visions for the forthcoming 10 years to the year 2015.

3. We found the fruitful discussions that were held in the course of the three days of Forum meetings instructive, and reviewed the papers, documents, studies and research that were presented to the Forum, based on the authority of the outcomes, recommendations, resolutions and programmes of work of the conferences and meetings that were held by the United Nations system, regional organizations, the League of Arab States, the Forum of African and Arab Parliamentarians on Population and Development and, in particular, the 1994 Programme of

Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the United Nations Millennium Declaration of 2000, General Assembly resolution S-26/2, Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, the Rabat Declaration 2003 on Population and Development and the resolutions adopted by the Summit Conference of the Arab League Council held in Tunis in 2004.

4. We appreciate the consensus reached by the international community in adopting the principles, goals and policies of the 1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, and its renewed and sustained commitment to those principles, goals and policies. We hereby renew our commitment to principle 5 of the Programme of Action, which states that population-related goals and policies are integral parts of cultural, economic and social development, the principal aim of which is to improve the quality of life of all people.

5. We believe that the goals of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Millennium Development Goals are complementary and inter-related, and that realization of the former is fundamental to achieving the latter.

6. We affirm the importance of the fruitful regional endeavours that have been exerted in the Arab region as part of United Nations system and League of Arab States activities, which have helped to improve the prospects for achieving higher standards in implementing the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

7. With the aim of moving towards the full realization of the goals adopted, we are committed to the exertion of greater efforts with respect to national and regional programmes and projects, in light of the review of the progress made in implementing the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the reports and studies that have been submitted to this Forum and of current requirements.

8. We are aware that the strategies and goals which it is hoped will be realised at the national and regional levels require collaboration in the making of strenuous efforts and close cooperation between all the parties involved in the fields of population and development, including Governments, the private sector, civil society institutions and regional, Arab and international organizations, in a true partnership that provides communication and the exchange of expertise, and as part of which complementary roles are performed in projects and programmes that include all the partners and aim to improve the quality of life of our Arab communities.

9. We reaffirm that if economic and social development is to be realized, a stable political and security environment must exist, that is supportive of Government efforts and policies aimed at sustainable development.

10. We acknowledge the sovereign right of every State to implement the recommendations of the Regional Arab Population Forum as most appropriate to its development priorities, the legislation in force, and the cultural and moral values of the Arab peoples, and in accordance with recognised human rights. We further acknowledge the outstanding regional efforts that are being exerted in the Arab region in this regard.

Noting that the final communiqué will contain all the recommendations reached by the Forum, we hereby agree on the following:

11. To express our appreciation of the endeavours of the United Nations Population Fund, the League of Arab States and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in support of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

12. To urge the Governments of Arab States to activate population policies and human development strategies in the framework of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development; to develop sources of self-finance through local institution and private sector initiatives, with a view to making resources available and employing them in implementing population policies; and to take action to diversify sources of funding and include international, regional and national sources from the public and private sectors, in addition to the civil sector, in order to follow up implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

13. To urge Governments to firmly establish cooperation with civil society, with a view to preparing an environment favourable towards partnership in the field of population and development, in a climate of transparency and democracy; and to support and develop regional trends aimed at implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development through the full participation of civil society organizations.

14. To urge the Governments of Arab States, with the support of international and regional organizations, to exploit the demographic window in the current generation, which represents a unique opportunity to accelerate the process of sustainable development in the Arab region and, consequently, to formulate and apply employment policies that make best use of the increasing labour force and enable those Governments to achieve the development goals that are sought, combat the phenomena of youth unemployment and female poverty, and meet the needs of elderly persons and those with special needs.

15. To urge the Governments of Arab States to pay greater attention to the phenomenon of the migration of Arab labour, and include it in national development policies; to establish relationships with well-qualified migrants and attempt to attract them back to their original countries; to strengthen their role in development efforts and the transfer of knowledge; and to take the steps and implement the procedures that will reduce the brain drain.

16. To urge the international community to deal with the damage caused by war and armed dispute and their impact on the family and, in particular, on women and children and on implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development in general.

17. To affirm the importance of State and donor institution compliance with the financial undertakings they gave at the International Conference on Population and Development and, in particular, to pay the amount of US\$ 3 billion by the end of 2005.

18. To urge all the relevant partners in population and development, including Governments, regional and international organizations and civil society institutions, to incorporate the recommendations of this Forum in undertakings and commitments that form part of new programmes and projects relating to population and development, the aim being to achieve qualitative movement towards the Millennium Development Goals.

19. To express appreciation of the great value of the masses, given that they are the fundamental hope for the betterment of mankind and building of the future, and to stress that they should be given priority and consideration, and that programmes which aim to meet their needs and improve their quality of life should be supported. It must be made possible for them to participate effectively in building the future; they must be empowered with knowledge and provided with the services necessary in order to protect them from HIV/AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases.

20. To affirm the importance of empowering women politically, economically and socially; placing them in decision-making positions, given that they are principal actors in the implementation of the goals of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development; taking the necessary action to protect them from all the forms of

discrimination and violence to which they are exposed; creating appropriate economic opportunities to counter the phenomenon of women's poverty; and ensuring reproductive rights for all women and men as part of their human rights.

21. To intensify media activities, awareness-raising and communication relating to population and development issues, and highlight the role of the media as a partner in raising the awareness of the public of the demands of the development process.

22. To request ESCWA, the United Nations Population Fund and the League of Arab States to support the relevant existing regional and national executive mechanisms and establish a new regional mechanism for the follow up of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the recommendations of this Forum; encourage the countries of the region to exchange expertise and benefit from successful experiences; and to strengthen statistical systems and databases with a view to gauging outcomes and identifying obstacles.

23. In conclusion to the foregoing, participants express their determination to continue action to achieve all the goals of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Millennium Development Goals and the other development ambitions to which the Arab countries aspire, with a view to achieving economic prosperity and social well-being for the Arab peoples.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

3. In addition to adopting the Beirut Declaration, Forum participants agreed on a set of recommendations aimed at following up the progress made in the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action its 5-year review (ICPD +5) and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Set forth below is the text of the recommendations:

(a) Population policies should be activated and such population issues as reproductive health, poverty, gender, youth and migration should be integrated into national development plans with a view to meeting the current and future development needs that are noted by global conferences on development;

(b) Appropriate policies and strategies for economic growth and the provision of employment opportunities should be formulated in the light of the changes occurring in the age structure of the population. Those changes will offer a demographic opportunity that is without precedent in the Arab region for increasing savings and investment, limiting migration and eradicating poverty;

(c) The role of national population councils should be activated, and they should provide guidance and coordination appropriate to the principles, strategic frameworks, goals and targets that were provided in the ICPD Programme of Action; the resolutions adopted by the twenty-first special session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1999; and the United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000. Those councils should also strengthen their relationship with the various sectoral ministries, with a view to ensuring that effective population policies are formulated and implemented against a background of good governance;

(d) Comprehensive reproductive health services should be made generally available and include the provision of information and counselling on family planning and prevention of sexually-transmitted disease; the provision by skilled medical personnel of ante- and post-natal and delivery care services and emergency delivery services; the adoption of systems to prevent and treat the deleterious effects of unsafe abortion; and the narrowing of the health care gap between rural and urban areas;

(e) Men should be involved in reproductive health programmes and responsible reproductive behaviour should be encouraged in men. Men should be made aware from an early age of the need to treat women as equal partners in the family and society;

(f) Policies and laws should be formulated to eradicate the practice of female circumcision, which is still practiced in certain Arab countries, using the various parties involved, including those who influence public opinion, religious leaders, parents, decision makers and consultative councils;

(g) Laws that are prejudicial to the rights of women should be amended and support provided to programmes and activities that promote gender equality and equity; all types of violence against women should be monitored; the education gender gap should be eradicated; women's participation at the economic and political levels should be strengthened; and the provisions and recommendations should be implemented of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

(h) While respecting the religious and cultural values of each country, legislation should be reviewed with the aim of ensuring the rights of adolescents and youth in educational, cultural and political life and their access to information and health services and, in particular, in relation to reproductive health and sexually-transmitted diseases. Action should be taken to update laws that uphold the right of Arab youth to participate in sustainable development endeavours;

(i) Youth and adolescents should be involved in formulating, implementing and evaluating awareness-raising programmes directed towards them, and they should be employed as trainers and peer counsellors. Such programmes should be based on in-depth studies and include information and counselling on mutual respect and gender equality, responsible sexual behaviour, family life, reproductive health, and the repudiation of violence, particularly violence against women;

(j) An Arab knowledge base or network should be established with the aim of raising levels of awareness by providing adolescents and youth with advice and information on reproductive health and endeavouring to change negative attitudes by adopting effective media, education and communication strategies aimed at the relevant sectors of society, including the education sector, which should incorporate age-appropriate reproductive health issues into educational curriculums;

(k) An Arab fund should be established to support Arab youth projects in various political, health, social and economic sectors. Such projects should include the introduction of an Arab youth network and the holding of periodic youth forums;

(l) The resources allocated to social and health fields should be increased, particularly for education, human resource development, primary health care and reproductive health, family planning services and programmes and safe motherhood, given that that will contribute to the eradication of poverty, empower women and reduce maternal and infant mortality;

(m) New methods and varied financing sources should be identified and resources mobilized through initiatives undertaken by local institutions and the private sector. Donor countries should honour their commitment to allocate 0.7 per cent of GDP to development assistance and allocate 4 per cent of that assistance to population programmes and activities;

(n) Partnership between Governments, civil society and regional and international organizations should be promoted on the basis of the responsibility of all relevant parties for achieving ICPD goals, in a climate of transparency, commitment and accountability.

II. ISSUES CONSIDERED

4. In five themed sessions, the Forum focused on a review of population and development issues over the past decade and future prospects; population, poverty and gender; reproductive health and rights; the opportunities open to and challenges faced by Arab youth; and demographic transition: process and implications.

5. The discussions that took place in the sessions considered a variety of issues that form part of the framework for implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action, the resolutions adopted by the twenty-first special session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1999, and the United Nations Millennium

Declaration, all of which, taken together, represent a large number of specific undertakings aimed at improving the quality of human life and well-being. Discussions also focussed on the response of Arab Governments to those issues in terms of formulating appropriate policies that accord with the goals stated in the international programmes for action. Set forth below is a brief review of the papers that were presented and the discussions they provoked.

A. REVIEW OF POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES IN THE PAST DECADE
AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

1. *Progress made in the Arab region in implementing the ICPD
Programme of Action*

6. This paper was prepared by Mr. Abdul Aziz Farah, Mr. Abdallah Al Zou'bi and Ms. Martine Najem Kteily and issued as E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/WG.1/12. It contains a review of the achievements realized by the Arab countries and the obstacles and constraints that they have faced in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action in all areas. It also includes a summary of the lessons learned from the attempts of Arab countries to improve the enabling environment for implementation of that Programme of Action. The paper is based on an analysis of the information derived from the field questionnaire aimed at evaluating the first ten years since ICPD, which was supplied by 17 of the 22 Arab countries. It is also based on the available indicators of population and social variables that indicate the extent to which the goals of national population policies and programmes have been achieved in the past decade.

7. The study concludes that, in order to achieve perceptible improvement at all levels in Arab countries, albeit at widely differing stages, a set of measures should be taken that include the following:

(a) Governmental and non-governmental efforts should be exerted at the national, regional and international levels with a view to mainstreaming population, reproductive health and gender issues into sustainable development strategies and their follow-up, in order to ensure that the measures taken at that level will contribute to changing levels of population growth, improve quality of life, and reduce poverty and internal migration to the desired level;

(b) Strategies should be formulated to eradicate poverty, make education and reproductive health available to all and achieve economic growth;

(c) The effects of economic reform programmes should be monitored and a cautious approach adopted to correcting deficiencies;

(d) The majority of programmes and strategies should be integrated in order to deal with issues related to population, development, reproductive health and the empowerment of women; and partnership should be established between Government mechanisms, the market and civil society at all stages of population and development policies, strategies and programmes;

(e) Information systems should be developed and the necessary quantitative and qualitative indicators devised for following up and evaluating plans and programmes for the implementation of population and development policies.

2. *Partnerships and resource flows in population, reproductive health
and development*

8. This paper was prepared by Mr. Toufic Osseiran, and issued as E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/WG.1/3. It covers many aspects of partnership and resource flows, but concentrates on the international aspect of partnership. It examines that issue in detail from the perspective of the ICPD Programme of Action, and puts forward tangible evidence of partnership that was confirmed by country questionnaires on implementation of the Programme of Action in the first five years. The paper also deals with the issue of resource flows, referring to the fact that scarcity of resources and insufficient funding are a cause of many problems,

including, inter alia, increased poverty throughout the world, increased infant and maternal mortality rates and scarcity of water.

9. The study concludes as follows:

(a) Governments are called upon to be open towards civil society organizations that can assist them in assuming their responsibilities and duties;

(b) The private sector is encouraged to assume a more effective and energetic role;

(c) The recommendations of regional and international conferences should be adopted and a commitment made to pursuing them in the forthcoming decade;

(d) Governments, civil society organizations and the private sector are called upon to discuss and develop means of obtaining the necessary financial support; and to take initiatives that will help to attract large financial resources.

10. During the discussions on this subject, the following main points were raised:

(a) Poverty and deprivation in all its forms should be considered as an integral part of other population issues. Arab countries are requested to strengthen mechanisms for dealing with poverty, thereby enabling the achievement of MDGs;

(b) Arab economic integration is important in confronting the challenges of poverty;

(c) The private sector has a role in providing youth employment opportunities;

(d) Education curriculums and the media have a role to play in raising awareness in the areas of support for women and improvement of reproductive health;

(e) Independent financial resources should be relied upon in the first stage for supporting national investment and only then should international contribution and/or support be sought;

(f) There is a need for partnership between the relevant parties in order to achieve the population goals relating to reproductive health;

(g) National population committees and councils have a responsibility for devising mechanisms for the implementation of decisions and programmes and for identifying the strengths and weaknesses of their missions and mechanisms;

(h) Training is important in order to develop human capacities in institutions;

(i) It is important that the necessary data and information is supplied for dealing with population issues;

(j) Amendments should be made to laws that concern women's issues, reproductive health rights, youth protection and support for ageing persons.

B. POPULATION, POVERTY AND GENDER

1. *Population, poverty and gender*

11. This paper was prepared by Mr. Abd El Basset Abd El Mo'ty and Mr. Abdul Aziz Farah, and issued as E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/WG.1/10. It is based on the hypothesis that progress in respect of reproductive health and support for related rights is a fundamental means of development in dealing with poverty on the one hand, and on the other hand, with the particularities of Arab population. The study focuses on defining

population and the concepts of reproductive health and poverty and the relationship between the two and with the challenges faced by the Arab countries in those areas. The paper also considers changing trends in reproductive health and poverty, and reviews a number of reproductive health indicators and general measures and procedures for upholding rights and reproductive health services. It further considers the most significant population challenges related to reproductive health and focuses on future trends, with a view to activating the role of reproductive health in combating poverty.

12. Some of the conclusions reached by the paper included the following:

- (a) There is a need to consider population issues as development issues;
- (b) Public health and other non-health sector policies should be reconsidered with a view to empowering poor persons;
- (c) Attention should be paid to databases on reproductive health;
- (d) Institutions should be developed, and available resources should be so mobilized and organized as to ensure work is continued;
- (e) Focus should be placed on advocacy for and raising awareness of reproductive health;
- (f) Personal status legislation should be reviewed;
- (g) The participation of women and youth should be promoted.

2. Macroeconomic aspects linking poverty, development and population

13. This paper was prepared by Ms. Batool Shakoori, and issued as E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/WG.1/11. It addressed one major hypothesis, namely, that demographic changes have significant economic benefits and that fertility and mortality rates affect levels of income because of changes in the age structure of the population. The report tracked the relationship between demographic changes as represented by, on the one hand, dependency rates and, on the other hand, economic performance, over the periods 1980-2000 and 2000-2015. The paper was based on the contemporary literature which views the relationship between population and economic growth as one of cause and effect and accept that the phenomenon of demographic effect has a major role in the development process, because it is linked to the human life cycle and consequently its impact on economic growth varies with the age distribution of the population.

14. The conclusions drawn in the paper included the following:

- (a) There is a need to ensure political support and consider the demographic window as a development strategy that can assist in eradicating poverty;
- (b) The macroeconomic models that have been recently developed should be adopted in order to comprehend the demographic changes that take place in the age structure of the population;
- (c) Economic accounts methods should be adopted in order to estimate the benefits of various human and financial investments;
- (d) Economic sectors should be so developed as to be capable of absorbing excess manpower;
- (e) Information systems that include data at micro and macro levels and labour market data should be established;
- (f) The educational system, which is the fundamental support of human resources, should be used to contribute to both the economic and social aspects of the development process;

(g) The duties of national population councils should be reconsidered and, while maintaining their role of coordinating between the various sectors, they should also perform oversight and guidance roles in order to ensure that policy formulation and implementation comply with the principles, strategic frameworks and goals set forth in the ICPD Programme of Action, the resolutions adopted by the twenty-first special session of the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

3. Poverty, gender equality and the empowerment of women

15. This paper was prepared by Ms. Heba Ellaithy, and issued as E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/WG.1/4. It addressed the issue of poverty in the Arab region and concepts related to human poverty and income poverty, focusing on the gender gap in the areas of health, education, economic activity and income. It also considered policies for the eradication of female poverty, the status of women in the Arab world in the light of the outcomes of ICPD and the Fourth World Conference on Women and the efforts exerted to eradicate poverty, and included information on social development funds. The paper emphasized the fact that all the Arab countries, to varying degrees, have problems in respect of human poverty.

16. The conclusions drawn in the paper included the following:

(a) There is a need to formulate macroeconomic policies and development strategies for dealing with poverty and its causes, and to accord particular importance to the needs and endeavours of women living in poverty;

(b) The economic rights and economic independence of women should be upheld;

(c) Credits, financial and technical assistance policies should be reviewed and women should be given the opportunity to access savings and credit mechanisms and institutions;

(d) Women should be empowered to benefit from social security systems, and social security networks for poor persons should be established;

(e) Education policies should be formulated and implemented in order to ensure equality of opportunity, and measures should be taken to combat gender discrimination in education;

(f) Policies for the training and retraining of women and, in particular, poor women and those returning to the labour market, should be formulated and implemented.

17. During discussion of this subject, the following main points were raised:

(a) The role of small loans and micro credit in improving the status of women and curbing the growth of poverty;

(b) Means of using the demographic window to assist poor persons in rural areas, where poverty levels are higher than in urban areas;

(c) The traditional role of institutions in exacerbating problems and failing to implement policies and the need to make institutional changes in a framework of good governance that will enable the Arab countries to exploit the demographic window;

(d) The slowness of the Arab countries to so reform education systems as to meet qualitative human resource needs;

(e) Poor results from investment and the need to direct savings towards the development of human resources;

(f) The fall in dependency rates and rise in population growth levels indicate a need to formulate comprehensive policies to make use of the labour force and strategies that focus on labour intensity, thereby making it possible to benefit from the demographic window;

(g) The phenomenon of the feminization of poverty is becoming an Arab phenomenon;

(h) The seriously detrimental consequences for poor persons of the public debt crisis and economic reform policies, which are exacerbated by their demographic particularities, including rising levels of fertility and mortality, particularly maternal mortality;

(i) In most cases, population and poverty eradication policies ignore the needs of refugees;

(j) The imbalance in the distribution of resources and wealth is considered one of the direct causes of poverty;

(k) Administrative reform has a role in curbing the corruption of purchasers in official departments and improving levels of performance.

C. REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

1. *Reproductive health and reproductive rights in the Arab region*

18. This paper was prepared by Ms. Laila Nawar, and issued as E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/WG.1/9. It contains a full review of reproductive health issues in the Arab region and gives a comprehensive picture of achievements, priorities and obstacles. The focus is on the two issues of fertility and family planning, with reference being made to maternal mortality, female circumcision and the position and knowledge of adolescents with respect to reproductive health issues, sexually-transmitted disease and ante- and post-natal care, on the basis of ICPD and the Fourth World Conference on Women, and using information taken from the health information system prepared by the Population Policies Department of the League of Arab States, which contains information on marriage and reproductive health from 16 Arab countries.

19. The paper draws a number of conclusions concerning the improvement of reproductive health in Arab countries, which include the following:

(a) Overall fertility and maternal mortality levels should be reduced by improving ante- and post-natal care systems;

(b) The quality of family planning services should be improved and obstacles to access thereto should be eliminated;

(c) The gender gap with respect to reproductive health issues and rights should be eliminated;

(d) The need to combat HIV/AIDS;

(e) Female circumcision must be eliminated;

(f) The resources necessary to achieve the aims sought at the reproductive health and rights level must be made available.

2. *Maternal morbidity and mortality in the Arab world*

20. This paper was prepared by Ms. Nagiba Abdulghani Alshawafi, and issued as E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/WG.1/13. It aimed to analyse and identify the causes of maternal mortality in the Arab countries and to summarize the lessons learned from the successes and failures of the strategies pursued by those countries with a view to combating maternal and child mortality and the aim of making interventions consistent with current needs. The paper briefly reviewed the concept of maternal mortality, its

causes and related indicators, dealing with the pertinent direct and indirect factors within an analytical framework that identifies the outcomes of pregnancy and delivery as the interaction between the social, economic and cultural particularities of society and women's health and reproductive behaviour. It also considered levels of maternal mortality in the Arab countries, which have perceptibly increased, notwithstanding the commitment made by all those countries to reduce it. Reference was made to the difficulty of obtaining maternal mortality indicators, because precise data for its cause is not available in most Arab countries, and consideration was given to the measures that have been taken in those countries to reduce maternal mortality and to eliminate the obstacles to achieving the desired goals in countries where maternal mortality rates remain high.

21. The paper drew certain conclusions regarding the reduction of maternal mortality through political commitment. Those conclusions included the following:

- (a) Safe motherhood services should be provided;
- (b) Training should be provided for specialized health personnel, including licensed midwives;
- (c) Comprehensive and integrated health services should be provided;
- (d) A healthy environment should be guaranteed in service provision centres;
- (e) Women should be socially and economically empowered and their access to reproductive health services facilitated;
- (f) Comprehensive information on the causes of maternal mortality and morbidity should be made available.

22. In the course of the discussions on this subject, the following main points were raised:

- (a) Issues relating to reproductive health rights, including the right to choose whether or not to marry, the right to choose the age at which to marry and insistence on carrying out health checks before marriage;
- (b) The role of religious institutions in encouraging organizations and communities to deal with reproductive health issues and flexible interaction with the sensitivities that are related to this matter and deal with sensitive issues pertaining to reproductive health in a flexible manner;
- (c) The role of health facilities in rural and remote areas that provide reproductive health services and information on gender issues;
- (d) The symptoms faced by menopausal women and insufficient care given to the illnesses experienced by that group of women;
- (e) The risks of child-bearing in later age and need for information and awareness of the need to test for high-risk pregnancies;
- (f) High levels of maternal mortality and identification of means to improve services linked to care prior to conception, during pregnancy and after delivery;
- (g) The need to educate men about reproductive health and family planning in some marginal regions where they remain the decision makers in that respect;
- (h) The possible increase in numbers of cases of HIV/AIDS in the Arab region.

D. ARAB YOUTH: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

1. *Adolescent/youth reproductive health and reproductive rights in the Arab region*

23. This paper was prepared by Ms. Alissar Rady, and issued as E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/WG.1/6. It began with the incongruity of the situation where youth constituted one third of the population of the Arab region but there was a paucity of policies pursued or measures taken with a view to spreading awareness or providing protection or reproductive health services for youth. Such policies did little to reduce numbers of early pregnancies or levels of maternal morbidity or mortality in that age group. The paper reviewed youth rights with respect to reproductive and sexual health and their early access to pertinent information and services based on the concept of comprehensive reproductive health as determined by the ICPD Programme of Action and other international instruments, which affirm that youth are a development priority.

24. The conclusions drawn in the paper included the following:

(a) There is a need for strategic planning for adolescent reproductive and sexual health, along the lines proposed by ICPD;

(b) Investment is needed in youth health, education and protection, and their rights to reproductive and sexual health should be protected. Their access to information on reproductive and sexual health and to means of protecting against pregnancy and sexually-transmitted disease should be facilitated, as a basic human right;

(c) Studies on youth needs should be followed up and special programmes developed that are aimed at those needs;

(d) Youth should be involved in drawing up programmes that are pertinent to them, in accordance with the law, and local social, religious and cultural values.

2. *Social, economic and cultural dimensions of Arab adolescents/youth*

25. This paper was prepared by Ms. Iman Farag, and issued as E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/WG.1/8. It stated that the resolution of youth-related issues, which is a priority of regional and international organizations, reflects the renewal of old and deeply-rooted concerns. In one respect, they represented a recognition of the particularities of youth issues, while in another, they embodied the extent to which those issues were bound up with the whole range of political, economic and social challenges that faced contemporary societies. The paper endeavoured to shed light on some youth- and adolescent-related economic, social and cultural dimensions of the Arab world 10 years after ICPD. Youth are no longer viewed solely as the future, but as full participants in society, and concern for youth in Arab countries is directly linked to the current demographic pressure of that age group, a feature which is common to all the Arab countries.

26. The conclusions drawn in the paper included the following:

(a) Dialogue must be employed in order to meet the needs of youth and answer their questions at all stages of life and in all social situations;

(b) Youth issues should be linked to health, because of its current and future relevance;

(c) The social and cultural component of youth health involves a precise balance between protection, rights and responsible freedom.

3. *Youth participation*

27. A group of youth from Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Sudan and Tunisia presented a report on discussions at the Arab Youth Forum that was held in tandem with the main Forum. In that statement, they raised questions as to their

status and the bases of democracy, reform and empowerment and set forth their ambitions and recommendations at the political, social, economic and health levels and their wish to share responsibility for the development process. The intervention met with the approval of the participants, and the importance was emphasized of exerting greater efforts to meet the needs of youth and involve them in the decision-making process at all levels.

28. At the Arab Youth Forum, a set of recommendations were made that were taken into consideration in the recommendations made by the Regional Arab Population Forum. They were aimed at ensuring political and democratic participation for Arab youth at the national and regional levels, personal development, the development and absorption of their resources and ending harmful practices, as well as ensuring opportunities for employment, the equitable distribution of income and the provision of high-quality, rights-based reproductive health services.

29. During the relevant discussions, the following main points were raised:

(a) The importance of communication, awareness raising and education in the area of reproductive health and rights;

(b) The health, including psychological health, services offered and the youth centres and programmes that exist in the Arab region are inadequate;

(c) The role and duties of the family and the empowerment and training of women, which entails the training of youth;

(d) The need for education curriculums that promote the thinking and understanding of youth;

(e) The role of schools and universities in providing youth training and, in particular, the preparation of the necessary groups to raise peer awareness;

(f) The lack of integrated policies, failure to incorporate youth issues into development programmes and lack of follow-up to and evaluation of achievements;

(g) Lack of databases and information on youth issues.

E. DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION: PROGRESS AND IMPLICATIONS

1. *The process of demographic transition and its impact in the Arab region*

30. This paper was prepared by Mr. Hafedh Chekir, and issued as E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/WG.1/7. It dealt with the implications of Arab countries' entry into the process of democratic change while lacking an appropriate development model that would allow them to improve their economies, overcome poverty, improve the quality of their human resources with a view to their optimum employment, increasing the productivity of the labour force and achieving a balance between population and economic growth. The paper also considered the features of demographic change in Arab countries, changing marriage and family patterns and changes in the prevailing system of values that could affect reproductive behaviour. Consideration was also given to the population pyramid and needs of certain groups, including youth and ageing persons.

31. The conclusions drawn in the paper included the following:

(a) There is a need for greater political commitment in the Arab countries and for improved population policies that should be incorporated into development strategies;

(b) Social and economic development should be strengthened by investing in primary human resources;

(c) Programmes should be directed towards increasing opportunities for access to information and health education services;

(d) Women must be empowered and the issues of youth, adolescents and ageing persons addressed.

2. Population policies and demographic transition in the Arab region, with special reference to the GCC countries

32. This paper was prepared by Ms. Maitha Al-Shamsi, and issued as E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/WG.1/5. It considered demographic change and the priorities and most significant outcomes of population policies in the Arab countries and, in particular, the GCC States. It also reviewed the challenges posed by demographic change and strategies for dealing with them. The paper was based on two premises, the first of which concerned the close link between population issues and development. The second, which was a development of the first, posited that all the challenges that face developing societies, including Arab societies, foremost among which are poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and the status of women, contribute to the high levels of fertility and mortality and low economic production.

33. The conclusions drawn in the paper included the following:

(a) In certain Arab countries, the application of population policies has had perceptible results. However, those policies have not addressed all aspects of the problem and do not articulate a strategic vision that fuses the demands of comprehensive development with those of demographic change, which is clear from the worsening problem of migration to the cities from rural areas and the various reasons for that migration, and the growing problem of unemployment;

(b) A single policy should be formulated to address immigrant employment issues that are common to all the GCC States as well as the particular needs of each individual State;

(c) The demographic window should be exploited to achieve economic growth, by developing human resources and improving labour productivity;

(d) A Gulf information network should be established, in order to assist in the formulation of population and naturalization policies;

(e) Investment should be made in womens' education and skills development, in guaranteeing their rights and strengthening their participation in economic activity and political life.

34. During the relevant discussions, the following main points were raised:

(a) The real dimension of the problem goes beyond the issue of increasing population growth, and lies in a disregard for such basic issues as health and a failure to seriously address, inter alia, youth, migration and education issues;

(b) There is a need to focus on the quality of education, rather than merely on quantity, if population well-being is to be assured;

(c) There is a lack of information on population policies in the Arab region;

(d) The high-quality health care that is available in GCC countries is the result of the economic standard and national income levels;

(e) Policies aimed at curbing migration have failed.

F. OTHER ISSUES

35. At the closing session, participants reviewed the most prominent issues and challenges that were discussed at the five sessions of the Forum and noted some general conclusions relating to future procedures for addressing the challenges of poverty, reproductive health, women, youth, participation and the mobilization of resources, from the perspective of the ICPD Programme of Action and the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

36. Proponents of the ICPD Programme of Action made interventions in which they commended Forum outcomes and averred the support of participating countries for its recommendations and their follow-up by implementation of that Programme of Action and through the cooperation of ESCWA, the League of Arab States and UNFPA.

37. General discussions then considered the integration of the roles of the public, private and non-governmental sectors and the need to provide the necessary human and financial resources to implement the Programme of Action. Reference was also made to the matter of the family and its natural role in dealing with social issues, and the need to support youth institutions and organizations in the Arab countries. The issue of youth should be made a Government priority, and the role and impact of the media should be strengthened.

38. The Forum concluded with brief interventions from the organizers.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATE OF FORUM

39. The Regional Arab Population Forum was held at ESCWA headquarters in United Nations House, Beirut, from 19 to 21 November 2004.

B. OPENING

40. Ms. Mervat Tallawy, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, made a statement at the inaugural meeting in which she said that any evaluation of the achievements of Arab countries over the past decade and consideration of future developments must take into account other international experiences and, in particular, those of the industrialized countries and the East Asian countries, each of which had addressed population issues very differently. Those of the former made it clear that technological progress played an important part in promoting economic growth which, in turn, led to demographic changes and reduced fertility levels to rates appropriate to income growth and with the development of production frameworks and the hegemony of the industrial sector. The experience of the East Asian countries demonstrated that demographic change was not so much the result as the cause of increased economic growth. However, those countries had used their huge populations to bring about development, considering them as true wealth and human capital. With respect to the Arab region, it was currently at a crossroads, facing enormous challenges with limited options. While the Arab countries had grasped the importance of incorporating demographic changes into the planning process and preparation of national programmes, the policies pursued were not effective in accelerating demographic change or altering the age pattern of populations and thereby reducing the burden of dependency and affording opportunities for greater saving and investment.

41. Ms. Thoraya Obaid, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UNFPA, made a statement in which she said that the Arab countries were undergoing strategic change that was represented by their increased adoption of policies for gender equality and the empowerment of women, and by the mainstreaming of population issues in the development process. Ms. Obaid stressed that national population programmes should be incorporated into the cultural and value framework of Arab societies and be consistent with contemporary issues and challenges. However, while impressive achievements had been realized in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action, huge discrepancies in that regard remained between the Arab countries and within individual countries, and the level of achievement that had been

hoped for had therefore not been realized. It was important that policies should be formulated to guide Arab youth, who were facing social and economic challenges, towards remunerative work and positive behaviour.

42. Ms. Nancy Bakir, Deputy Secretary General for Social Affairs, League of Arab States, made a statement in which she said that increasing attention was being accorded by the Arab countries to the health, education and social affairs of their populations. That attention was evident in their adoption of the ICPD Programme of Action and the measures that had been taken to follow up implementation of that Programme and the positive changes that had taken place in that respect and, in particular, the fall in illiteracy rates and falling levels of infant and maternal mortality. However, there was a need for attention to be paid to the Arab brain drain and the issue of the transfer of the Arab labour force outside the Arab region, which should be dealt with as a priority, given that it was one of the major challenges to development in that region.

43. Mr. Ghazi Zaiter, Minister of Social Affairs of Lebanon, President of the National Population Committee and sponsor of the Forum, made a statement in which he said that the right to development was a universal and inalienable right and an integral component of basic human rights. Human beings were the fundamental concern of development. The lack of stability in the world was the outcome of the lack of social equity and the hegemony of the countries of the North over the countries of the South and their exploitation of globalization and international trade to monopolize wealth at the expense of the developing and poor countries.

44. The Forum aroused media interest: many journalists attended its meetings and extensive coverage was given by all forms of the media to its proceedings.

C. PARTICIPANTS

45. The Forum was attended by experts and prominent representatives of the executive and legislative institutions of member countries, international governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and research and academic centres. The list of participants is given in the annex to this report.

Annex*

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