

XV. THE ICPD AND MDGS: CLOSE LINKAGES

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

A. INTRODUCTION

A global consensus emerged at the Millennium Summit, where 189 world leaders adopted the Millennium Declaration that set out a number of interconnected goals to create an environment conducive to development. The MDGs were not conceived of as a comprehensive end in themselves, but rather as a tool or framework for achieving lasting sustainable development and poverty eradication. Similarly, at the ICPD conference, 179 countries agreed that population and development are inextricably linked, and that empowering women and meeting people's needs for education and health, including reproductive health, are necessary for both individual advancement and balanced development. The Conference adopted a 20-year Programme of Action, which focused on individuals' needs and rights, rather than on achieving demographic targets. Advancing gender equality, eliminating violence against women and ensuring women's ability to control their own fertility were acknowledged as corner stones of population and development policies.

While the MDGs do not contain any specific goal or target on reproductive health, they do contain specific targets related to components of reproductive health, including maternal health, HIV/AIDS and gender equality. Many of the goals contained in the ICPD Programme of Action (United Nations, 1995) and the ICPD+5 Key Actions (United Nations, 1999) parallel those of the MDGs (figure XV.1). The ICPD Programme of Action's focus on population-and development-related efforts, such as increasing access to reproductive health services, promoting gender equality, and nurturing a better understanding of the linkages between population dynamics, development and poverty, is a prerequisite to the achievement of the larger development goals of the MDGs, such as eradicating poverty and hunger. Both the ICPD Programme of Action and MDGs set targets for providing universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases. The ICPD Programme of Action is aligned with the MDGs' focus on ensuring environmental sustainability by recognizing the linkages between the environment and internal and international migration, population growth rates, and resource consumption.

B. POPULATION AND POVERTY REDUCTION

In trying to understand better the role of ICPD Programme of Action in attaining the MDGs, it is important to bear in mind that population and poverty linkages are complex and multi-faceted because they operate at the individual, household, community, and national levels. Population dynamics therefore need to be seen in the context of changing age distributions, population movements and densities to assess the dynamics of demographic change on poverty, inequality, and economic growth. The impacts go beyond the walls of the household, as the forces behind population dynamics—enabling of reproductive health care, women's empowerment, and empowerment through knowledge—also work to reduce gender disparities and improve overall well-being within the household.

Looking at each of the MDGs in turn, it is possible to look into the linkages between population, reproductive health, and poverty in some more depth.

MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

The ICPD Programme of Action and ICPD+5 benchmarks aim for universal access to voluntary reproductive health services, including family planning. Access to these services will give their users fundamental choices that will change the repetitive cycle of poverty, inequality, and slow economic growth. With access to family planning, women and men can decide if, when and how many children they want. There is a wide and growing body of evidence in all developing regions showing that larger households have a much higher incidence of poverty. This is largely due to the increased dependency burden, where more family members must divide a given level of income and consumption. The close association between trends in fertility and poverty is shown in figure XV.2 below. Over time, this poverty is likely to be transmitted intergenerationally, as fewer resources are available to invest in children's, especially girls', education. Lowering fertility at the household level to levels desired by families can therefore have a large impact on poverty and hunger. Inequality in access to reproductive health services is reflected by the fact that it is the poorest households who have the least access to family planning and reproductive health facilities, as highlighted in figure XV.3 below. Finally, these dynamics of population and poverty are magnified at the macro level, as the age structure of the entire economy shifts to working-age adults when fertility falls. It is this "demographic window" that provides an opportunity for countries to take advantage of increases in labour inputs, saving, and capital accumulation per capita that fuel investment and growth.

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Figure XV.3. Contraceptive prevalence rate by income quintile

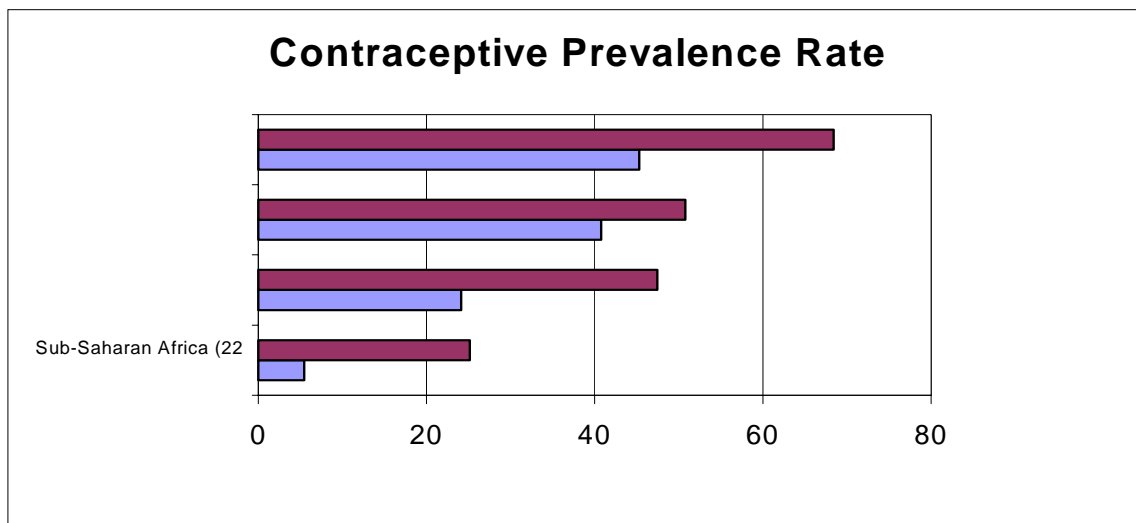


Figure XV.4. Youth fertility and literacy ratios 6

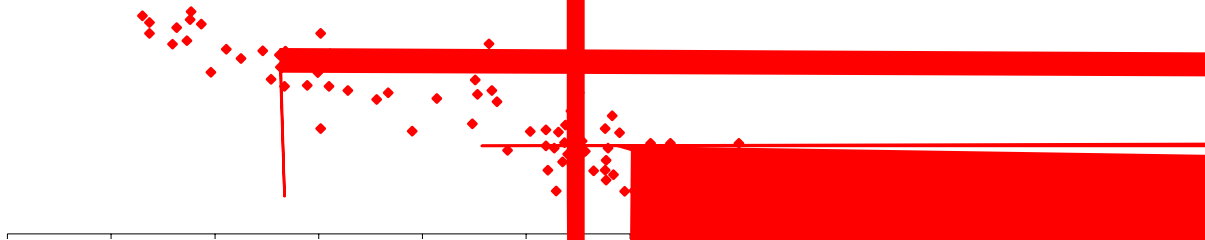
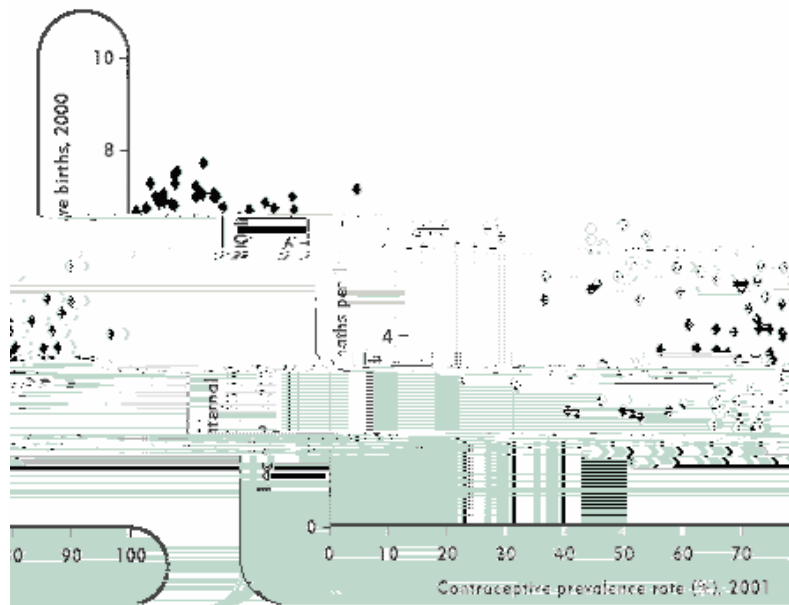


Figure XV.5. Maternal mortality and contraceptive prevalence rates



MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has hit most low-income countries where knowledge about, and access to, reproductive health information and services is lowest. Universal access to reproductive health care is critically important in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The ICPD notes that better information on HIV/AIDS

As shown in figure XV.6 above, there is increasing evidence that as the pandemic spreads, it disproportionately hits women. In sub-Saharan Africa, more women than men are infected, reflecting wide disparities in power relations and education that limit women's ability to negotiate condom use. Addressing the spread of HIV/AIDS is therefore very closely linked with achieving the overall ICPD Programme of Action.

MDG 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

The complex relationship between population, poverty, and the environment has received substantial attention over recent years, especially in the context of the simultaneous occurrence of population growth and environmental degeneration. Problems of environmental degradation and resource depletion are often exacerbated by, demographic factors, especially when these are combined with poverty.

Continued growth of populations and economies threatens food and water security, forest resources and biodiversity, and increases pressure on limit

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