Overview of Priorities for the Post-2015 Development Agenda

The High-Level Task Force for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)* affirms that sexual and reproductive health and rights, the empowerment of women and gender equality, and the rights and empowerment of adolescents and youth must be placed at the heart of sustainable development. These are crucial ends in themselves, State’s obligations to fulfill, and keys to achieving poverty eradication, social justice, educational, health, economic and sustainable development objectives. They lie at the core of human development, foundations for building the resilience of individuals and communities and for fostering vibrant and prosperous societies. They are thus essential priorities for a sound and effective post-2015 global agenda, rooted in human rights and dignity.

The High-Level Task Force for ICPD recommends that these three, inter-related and mutually-reinforcing pillars receive the highest order of prioritization in the post-2015 development agenda. Subject to the framework model to be adopted, these areas should be explicitly addressed as goals, targets and indicators, and as cross-cutting ('mainstreamed') elements. These are fundamental human rights issues, as well as prerequisites for the achievement of all other development objectives. Specifically, the Task Force calls for the following, as not only strategic and ‘smart’ investments, but also as ethical imperatives for equitable, inclusive progress:

Advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights for all women, men and young people, by:

✓ Accelerating implementation of universal access to quality sexual and reproductive information, education and services across the life-cycle, from younger to older age groups, to improve quality of life and well-being, with emphasis on: prevention of unwanted and early pregnancy, unsafe abortions, maternal deaths, and HIV and sexually transmitted infections; improving women’s and children’s health and survival; prevention and early detection of non-communicable diseases of the reproductive system, especially breast and cervical cancer; access to affordable supplies; integration of services, especially of those related to HIV with other sexual and reproductive health services; and of responses to violence against women and girls and sexual abuse of boys and men.

✓ Providing recognition and protections in national legislation that affirm fundamental human rights, specifically sexual and reproductive rights, by removing legal, policy, regulatory barriers and punitive provisions, and guaranteeing people’s ability to exercise these rights, including access to relevant information and services, without discrimination, coercion or violence on any grounds, regardless of age, sex, race, ethnicity, culture, religious, marital, disability, HIV, national origin, migrant, language, sexual orientation, gender identity or other factors and status. These encapsulate fundamental rights and freedoms to make basic decisions about one’s body, health, sexuality, relationships, marriage and childbearing, and are essential for achieving women’s and young people’s empowerment and gender equality.

* The High-Level Task Force for ICPD is a group of eminent and distinguished leaders acting in their individual capacities, with a record of service as heads of state, ministers and parliamentarians, civil society, private sector and philanthropic leaders, co-chaired by former Presidents Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique and Tarja Halonen of Finland.
Advancing women’s empowerment and gender equality by:

- Closing gender gaps at all levels of education, with particular attention to quality education for all girls and boys, girls’ completion of secondary education, and eliminating female illiteracy.
- Ensuring women’s equal access to livelihood and employment opportunities, including equal pay with men, access to productive assets, banking and financial services, agricultural supports, equal access to land, property and inheritance, and to technology, training and ICTs (Information and Communications Technologies). Creation of livelihood and employment opportunities for older women is especially crucial in countries without strong pension or social security systems.
- Expanding women’s leadership in decision-making, including through affirmative action measures to increase their political participation at local and national levels, and further participatory and inclusive governance and democracy.
- Eliminating all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, through legislative reforms and enforcement, prevention efforts engaging young people and men, and ensuring access to health, social and legal services for all victims.

Advancing the human rights and empowerment of adolescents and youth by:

- Providing access to comprehensive sexuality education, in and out of school, and to sexual and reproductive health services, in order to enable them to plan their lives, understand and make informed decisions about their sexuality, protect themselves from HIV and sexually transmitted diseases, and keep girls in school by avoiding early and unwanted pregnancy.
- Ensuring legal measures, policies and public education to protect the human rights of girls, especially from all forms of violence, exploitation and trafficking, and for the elimination of harmful practices, including child marriage and female genital mutilation; prohibit expulsion from school due to pregnancy; and remove barriers to adolescents’ access to sexual and reproductive health information and services.
- Ensuring young women and men acquire relevant skills to enter the workplace, and have access to decent employment and livelihood opportunities. Youth-friendly job creation policies should build partnerships across schools, community organizations and the private sector, and provide training programs, related economic opportunities, and productive assets for a successful transition from school to the workforce.

Ensuring a robust accountability framework rooted in human rights, equality and equity principles, by:

- Establishing measures and mechanisms to track political, programmatic and financial accountability for commitments made and for human rights obligations, at national, regional and global levels. This includes tracking health sector system strengthening and budgets to ensure sexual and reproductive health information, education and services receive priority attention. Accountability also means ensuring that those most marginalized can access and afford services, by ensuring inclusion of sexual and reproductive health services in universal health coverage schemes and by removing user fees.
- Paying particular attention to data generation, disaggregation and analysis that addresses inequalities and diversity among population groups, especially to ensure that the poorest and excluded sectors are accessing the policies, laws and services put in place, in both urban and rural contexts, including migrant, displaced, conflict-affected, indigenous and minority populations, and with particular attention to women, adolescents and youth, and older persons living in poverty.
- Maintaining a focus on State accountability, by Governments to their people, while tracking fulfillment of commitments by multiple actors, including the UN System, development cooperation partners, the private sector and other relevant sectors. Accountability systems should be inter-sectoral and grounded in participatory approaches that ensure the meaningful engagement of diverse women’s, youth and other civil society organizations in policy-making and monitoring processes.