

Hopes for ICPD

These and other developments will be reflected in next September's ICPD, which I hope will accomplish at least the following:

1. Outline a plan of action linking population concerns to those of economic growth and sustainable development. Two goals are prominent — first, more effective local action to meet individual needs and aspirations of both men and women, and, second, more effective *national policies and programmes to bring population into balance with available resources*.
2. Reaffirm the right of women of access to good-quality reproductive health-care, including access to safe and affordable methods of *family planning as a basic human right of all women*.
3. Ensure that all population and development policies and endeavours emphasize the *empowerment of women*.
4. Decide on a plan of action which will *stabilize population growth-rates*, ease pressures underlying rapid urbanization and migration within and across national borders, and safeguard the rights of international migrants.

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 GUEST COMMENT

Desertification Convention Essential for Food Security*

The deterioration of land resources in the world's arid and semi-arid regions is one of the gravest problems facing our planet and its people. Desertification, broadly defined, is one of the principal barriers to sustainable food security and sustainable livelihoods in our world today. It is not a future global threat; it is a devastating day-to-day local reality. If we aspire to provide sustainable food security and sustainable livelihood for the world's expanding populations, we must not merely attack desertification; we must not merely halt desertification, but actually reverse desertification.

Sustainable Food Security Fundamental

A central development objective, fundamental to all else, is sustainable food security. At the very centre of concern about development must be due concern with food, agriculture, and people. In the developing countries, an estimated 13–18 million people, mostly children, die from hunger, malnutrition, and poverty-related causes, each year. That is about 40,000 people a day, or 1,700 people an hour. One thousand million people — nearly 20% of the global population — live in households that are too poor to obtain the food which is necessary for sustaining normal work, and some 500 millions live in households that are too poor to obtain the food which is needed for minimal activity. One child in three is underweight by age five. As the Bellagio Declaration on Overcoming Hunger in the 1990s states, 'In a world of potential food plenty, we have collectively failed more than one [thousand millions] of our people.'

Today's failure may be but a prologue to a much larger failure in the future. The average person among the four thousand millions living in the developing countries now consumes about 2,500 calories of food each day. The average person living in Western Europe consumes 3,400 calories per day or, in the United States, more than 3,600 calories. If the world's people are to have a nutritionally adequate diet, world food output must at least triple over the next half-century, given likely population increases. It would be difficult enough to achieve this expansion under favourable circumstances, and conditions may be far from favourable.

For example, according to recent estimates by some of the world's leading soil scientists, an area of about 1.2 thousand million hectares — about the size of China and India combined — has experienced moderate to extreme soil deterioration since World War II as a result of human activities. Over three-fourths of that deterioration has occurred in the developing regions, most of it in arid and semi-arid areas. When combined with other environmental threats to the agricultural resource-base — loss of water and genetic resources, loss of cultural resources, and climate change, both local and global — the situation is disturbing indeed.

* Mr Speth kindly provided this editorial comment based on his address to the Third Session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the International Convention on Desertification, New York, NY, USA, on 17 January 1994. — Ed.

From this perspective, the goal of achieving sustainable food security in the decades ahead emerges as one of the greatest challenges humanity has ever faced. Food output must be tripled, and people must have the income to buy it. The erosion of the resource-base due to desertification and other factors must be halted and then reversed. Failure on any of these fronts will yield unprecedented international tragedy.

Effective International Convention on Desertification Now Crucial

An effective international convention on desertification is key to seeing that this future tragedy does not occur, and that today's deplorable situation is successfully addressed. At stake are the lives and well-being of the thousand million people who inhabit areas that are prone to drought and desertification. The countries most severely affected are among the poorest, with the lowest rankings on the Human Development Index, while within these countries the people most affected are the poorest and most marginalized. Failure to deal with desertification will accelerate the vicious cycle of expanding poverty, environmental decline, and mounting population pressures, leading to more emergency situations of famine and called-for relief.

It is my hope that, through the convention, we can develop a truly global partnership to bring desertification under control, to move to sustainable management of dryland areas, and to reclaim degraded arid lands. We should be very explicit about the convention's objectives. A priority, stated objective should be to *reverse* the desertification process in all countries where it is severe, and to do so within a designated time-frame.

Global Partnership Required

This global partnership would seek to reverse the process of desertification through a combination of policy initiatives (both national and international), long-term planning to arrest land degradation, and the commitment of meaningful financial, technological, policy, and political, support from countries that are in a position to provide assistance. While focused on curbing desertification, the partnership would promote broad-based and environmentally sustainable development. Among other approaches, the partnership would seek to create economic opportunities that take pressure off the most fragile of dryland areas.

The central mechanisms for arresting severe land-degradation can be: 1) national desertification action programmes, drawn up by the involved countries themselves (not by outside consultants); and 2) a new consortium of donor countries and multilateral agencies committed to providing major additional support through a process of country-by-country discussions. A new generation of national action programmes would specify what actions the country concerned would take in a variety of sectors and policy areas in order to halt land-degradation and address the underlying forces leading to desertification. Their development would involve extensive participation of NGOs, affected communities, women's groups, and grassroots organizations. It is critical that these action programmes deal with the true underlying causes of desertification. They must attack the root causes. They must deal honestly and courageously with the question: what will truly be required if we are going to reverse desertification in our country — that is, required from us as well as from others?

Industrial-country participants in the partnership would announce that they 'stand ready' to assist developing countries which are experiencing severe desertification. Significant new and additional resources would be available to help countries with qualifying action programmes. The decision to participate in the new programme would, however, rest entirely with the affected developing country.

Conclusion

To emphasize again, each national programme would specify targets for slowing and then reversing desertification over a period of 10 years or longer. The programmes would be based on broad public participation. They would focus on *all* key national and international policies bearing on land degradation. The understandings arrived at between developing countries and the donor consortium would provide a comprehensive range of economic and other support for the duration of the agreement, and not just financing of projects in a single sector.

The international convention on desertification has the potential to do something of tremendous importance — indeed of historical significance. From the abstract words and concepts of the negotiation process must come agreement; from agreement, action, and from action, results — real results for real people. It can happen and must be made to happen.

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