



Personal Contribution to the Helsinki Process

The Need for Better Research and Human Security

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Critical to facilitating and promoting a global governance premised on equity and equal opportunity is the extent to which minority entities and groups with special needs e.g. the poorest of the poor, women and female adolescents, communities and regions at a disadvantage can be targeted, their social and economic conditions studied, analysed and documented and the extent to which specific public and social policies and programmes designed to cater for their special needs can be monitored and evaluated.

Also critical is the extent to which such groups are enabled to participate in identifying and defining their needs, involved in formulating appropriate, feasible and socio-culturally acceptable strategies, and empowered to steer and monitor their implementation and account for their results and outcomes.

A typical case in point is the capacity of countries at the national and local levels to plan, monitor and account for the different strategies designed to meet the ICPD and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly those that aim at the poor and the disadvantaged groups.

The primary and indispensable means to achieve the above objectives is the existence of a research and analytical capacity within the community or the country and the existence of autonomous, competent, relevant and sustainable statistical systems that can inform policies at the national and decentralised levels. This provides interested parties the necessary and adequate tools to monitor policy implementation and define and measure performance and quality outcome parameters.

The challenge is multi-fold: a) generate a demand for systematic planning on the part of data users and people holding public office; b) create and sustain the adequate individual and institutional capacity to provide the necessary research and data tools for such systematic planning at national and local levels of governance; c) establish a normative framework and quality assurance institutions and mechanisms to ensure minimum standards of transparency and accountability; d) promote, nurture and protect the culture of a structured, data-based, documented, accountable and responsible planning; and, e) sanction public policies on the basis of a wider range of participation of the people of concern.

The reality of many developing and least developed countries in matters of research and development capacity is dismal and desolate. Investing selectively in skills and human resource enhancement in the absence of appropriate and viable political and administrative structures and institutions to absorb qualified human resources has often had the adverse effect of triggering a chain of brain drain, which could only worsen the situation of the countries or the communities of concern.

A timely opportunity for the Helsinki Process is to provide or advocate for the kind of policy, financial and technical backing and support that are required to ensure the strengthening of relevant statistical and research institutions that can guide and check public policies in the inclusive interest of all concerned. A golden opportunity presently is to provide the necessary advocacy, technical and financial support to the 2010 census round in a large number of countries in the South.

Human Security

The challenge the world community faces in the 21st century, is to reduce the severe poverty that afflicts 1.2 billion people today and to create the conditions to enable the 1 billion people that will be added to world population by 2015, to live free of poverty.

In 2003, 3 million people died of AIDS. While 5 million people were newly infected in 2003. Currently, there are 14 million aids orphans, most of whom live in Africa. The response to AIDS needs to be strengthened to ensure greater human security in the 21st century through an internationally collective response. In Africa, life expectancy has fallen by between 18 and 23 years in the worst affected countries; malnutrition has risen; immunization rates have dropped; 14 million children have been orphaned, and 4 million children have died of AIDS since the epidemic began.

The MDG's cannot be achieved if issues relating to population and reproductive health are not addressed.

Population issues, including population growth, location, age distribution and migration -- and their evolving dynamics -- must be integrated into the development process. Most critically, we know the Cairo Conference moved the discussion on population away from numbers and targets to a focus on women's rights as human rights. These rights include the right of every woman and couple to determine the number, spacing and timing of their children, and to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, violence and coercion. Perhaps most importantly, the Cairo Conference recognized the importance of empowering women so they can make their own choices and participate more fully in all aspects of society.

Human security cannot be achieved without ensuring that gender based discrimination and violence are addressed. Discrimination and violence faced by girls and women constitute a grave violation of human rights. Disparities in basic rights, schooling, health, credit and jobs or in the ability to fully participate in society take a direct toll on women and girls.

We now have solid evidence from the most contemporary research on population that indicates that working towards population goals helps reduce poverty in several ways. At the national level, it is becoming increasingly clear that slower population growth encourages overall economic growth. The best recent macro-level research suggests that from 1960 to 1995, about a fifth of economic growth is attributable to reductions

in mortality and about a fifth to reductions in fertility. Evidence also suggests that successful emerging economies almost always have favourable demographics.

To ensure the mobilization of all effective agents to address human insecurity, faith-based organizations seem to be an important actor. Faith-based institutions provide about 50 per cent of the health and education services in the poor communities; they have a large constituency including women and youth; they have outreach and networks and they are credible among the communities in which they work.

Thus, there is need to create more policy focus and allocate higher resources to population issues to ensure sustainable development due to the following:

- The population of the least-developed countries is expected to triple in the next 50 years, during which time the developing world as a whole will gain another 3 billion people, while the total population of the developed countries is expected to remain basically the same.
- There is rapid urbanization in the developing countries. This migration to the urban centres is being driven by several factors including environmental degradation, lack of arable land and water, and dreams of a better life.
- There are the great challenges posed by an ageing population as well as the largest ever youth generation in human history. While the greying of the planet is unprecedented and has reached a more advanced stage in the wealthier countries, it is a global phenomenon and many of the elderly are poor. Thus, any efforts to reduce poverty must also focus on the needs of a growing older population, a population that in most developing countries has no social safety net on which to rely in old age.