



Second Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues New York, 12 to 23 May 2003

Statement by the United Nations Population Fund

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in 1994 in Cairo, calls on Governments to address, in consultation with indigenous peoples and in collaboration with relevant NGOs and intergovernmental organizations, the specific needs of indigenous populations in all aspects of population and development, including their needs in reproductive health care.

The approved "Key Actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development", a result of the five-year review of the ICPD, reaffirms that Governments should promote and respect the rights of indigenous people with particular regards to their cultures, resources, belief systems, land rights and languages, and should expand their access to youth and adult education learning policies and programmes as well as reproductive health care services.

Within the scope of its mandate, UNFPA has been supporting initiatives and programmes targeting the specific needs of indigenous peoples, and in particular indigenous women and girls, to ensure that their rights are fully respected and realized. In effect, indigenous peoples, and particularly indigenous women and girls, often experience lack of access to basic social services including education and sexual and reproductive health skills and services and information. Several factors intervene to determine their access to these services, among others physical accessibility, affordability, cultural beliefs and discrimination, including gender-based discrimination.

The poor situation of many indigenous populations around the world, with regard to their enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights has encouraged UNFPA to take action, emphasizing on the promotion of reproductive health and rights. UNFPA emphasizes that access to reproductive health care is a right and should apply to all people, without discrimination. Moreover, effective sexual and reproductive health programmes safeguard other human rights such as the right to life, to health, to freely decide the number and spacing of children, to an adequate standard of living, to information and education, and to freedom from sexual violence and coercion.

Guided by paragraph 6.24 of the ICPD PoA, UNFPA's efforts have been directed to incorporate the perspectives and specific needs of indigenous communities into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the population, development and environment programmes that affect them; to ensure that they receive population - related services, which are socially, culturally and ecologically appropriate; and to address social and economic factors that act to the disadvantage of indigenous people.

UNFPA has implemented national and regional projects specifically targeted to indigenous peoples in Panama, Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia. These projects focus on improving the right to health, in particular reproductive health, through ensuring availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of health care, training of health care workers to respond to the needs of indigenous peoples. Other UNFPA-funded projects are found in hard to reach rural and urban areas in countries such as Vietnam, India, Uganda and Mexico.

UNFPA has been focusing in the supplying of information and health-care services that are culturally and language appropriate. Recently, UNFPA efforts have expanded to include the provision of bilingual literacy programmes, with literacy training in both the native languages as well as in the country's official language. They have proved to be excellent vehicles for transmitting information on reproductive health, gender and human rights to mostly non-literate indigenous people, as well as to non-indigenous communities, including community leaders, policy-makers, social and health workers and the media. A central concern of UNFPA's programmes focusing on indigenous peoples has been the incorporation of a gender perspective in order to respond to the very different needs of indigenous women and men and to address issues such as violence against women and girls.

Good practices

In Ecuador, UNFPA has been supporting an innovative project, which combines traditional indigenous healing practices with modern medicine. This project is being implemented within the framework of the goals and recommendations of the ICPD, and aims primarily at providing adequate sexual and reproductive health to the indigenous populations of Otavalo. To date, it has resulted in a significant improvement of the well-being of indigenous women and adolescents of Otavalo, but has also benefited indigenous and non-indigenous women and adolescents from other provinces. Moreover, the project has been expanded to include the specific needs of adolescents. Low user fees have been introduced with the aim of achieving self-financing. In coordination with the Commissariat of Woman, action has been taken to address the issue of domestic violence among indigenous communities. Community-meetings have been organized to sensitize indigenous peoples on women and girls rights.

In Bolivia, UNFPA is implementing a project focusing on bilingual literacy among Quechua-speaking women, men and adolescents in the departments of Potosi and Chuquisaca, applying reproductive health and gender concepts. It is aimed to alphabetize around 100,000 persons, among them 75 per cent of women and girls, and ultimately to

reinforce their self-esteem. Women in particular have a clear disadvantage in access to the labour market. Indigenous women suffer from the dual burden of ethnic and gender discrimination. They are captured in a vicious circle of poverty. Furthermore, they are subjected to domestic violence, which is perceived as social behavior, and is culturally acceptable. Through education, indigenous women will be able to take full participation in economic and social life. By demonstrating the productive role they can play, UNFPA aims at promoting women's empowerment to achieving gender equity.

In Peru, UNFPA funded the production of a prize-winning documentary film on the bi-literacy programme, called "Asi es esta historia". Furthermore, UNFPA and the Center for Amazonian Research and Promotion organized a Reproductive Health Seminar for indigenous women in Pucallpa, as well as support for a number of socio-demographic studies in the Andean region. The seminar produced a follow-up plan addressing integrated health issues and focusing on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of South-American indigenous women. In January 2001, a new sexual and reproductive health programme was launched, focusing on the specific needs of indigenous peoples in the Peruvian Amazon, with special attention given to the spread of HIV/AIDS among these communities. Information, Education and Communication (IEC) activities were undertaken to promote HIV/AIDS prevention.

In Mexico, UNFPA supported a project that deployed an audience-segmentation approach in order to ensure indigenous people's perspectives were reflected in messages. The Social Security Institute/Solidarity programme in Mexico produced culturally sensitive materials to reach indigenous rural populations. It emphasized interaction with indigenous communities and families, sensitivity to socio-cultural values and traditions, respect for traditional health practices and communication in the local language via bilingual residents.

The way forward

UNFPA will continue to participate in system-wide efforts, such as those of the permanent forum for indigenous peoples, and consult with partners of the United Nations Development Group on further possible contributions. In this respect, UNFPA contributed a report submitted to the First session of the Permanent Forum, May 2002, under item 6 of the provisional agenda: Review of activities of the United Nations System relating to Indigenous Peoples: an interactive discussion (E/CN.19/2002/2/Add.9, 9 April 2002); and contributed to the report by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people for the 59th session of the Commission on Human Rights: "The impact of major development projects on the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous communities".

With a view to improving the living conditions and health status of the indigenous peoples, UNFPA would like to make the following recommendations.

(a) Integrating a gender perspective at the centre of all policies and programmes affecting women's health, in particular indigenous women and girls, and involving them

in the planning, implementation and monitoring of such policies and programmes, and in the provision of health services.

(b) Creation of permanent national and local working groups that include government officials, NGOs, women's groups and indigenous peoples to ensure that reproductive rights are explicitly covered in policies and laws.

(c) For Governments, in collaboration with research institutions and NGOs, as well as with the assistance of the international community, strengthen national information systems to produce reliable statistics on a broad range of population and environment-related issues and to develop indicators in a timely manner. The indicators should include, inter alia, poverty measures at the community level, women and girls' access to social and economic resources, enrolment and retention of girls and boys in schools, and access to sexual and reproductive health information, education and services. All of the information should be disaggregated by population subgroups, including indigenous peoples, age and sex, which are crucial for translating policy into strategies that address age and gender concerns and for developing appropriate indicators for monitoring progress.

(d) Develop youth and adult education programmes with a focus on issues relating to indigenous peoples cultural context.