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**Follow-up actions to the recommendations of the International
Conference on Population and Development****Monitoring of population programmes focusing on
population, education and development, 2003****Report of the Secretary-General***Summary*

The present report on monitoring of population programmes has been prepared in response to the topic-oriented and prioritized multi-year work programme of the Commission on Population and Development, endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1995/55, which identified education as the special topic of the thirty-sixth session of the Commission. The report focuses on progress towards the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, especially as it relates to education, population and reproductive health. It does not attempt to document overall education policies and programmes.

The report highlights education as a human right and as a key factor in sustainable development through its links with demographic as well as economic, health and social factors. It states that reduction in fertility, morbidity and mortality rates and the empowerment of women are largely assisted by progress in education. Consistent with the millennium development goals, education is acknowledged as a means to enable individuals to have the knowledge and skills to cope with today's complex world. Literacy and basic education are considered major tools in building a cohesive and peaceful society for the twenty-first century. Particular attention is given to the education of young people, especially girls, and its impact on families, community and society. Among the broad social benefits of education mentioned in

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the report are increased family incomes, later marriages, reduced fertility rates, reduced infant and maternal mortality rates, better-nourished and healthier children and families, lower childbirth-related death rates, greater opportunities and life choices for women and men, better chances of protection against HIV/AIDS, and greater participation in decision-making and development.

The major challenges outlined in the report include addressing illiteracy, eliminating gender disparities, and reducing gaps in financing, information, and capacity to deliver quality education for all. These issues imply policy reforms, sustained advocacy and strengthened multi-sectoral partnerships, especially in the context of poverty reduction strategies. Recommendations for improving student learning need to focus on the physical environment, the teacher, the curriculum, the learning materials and alternative delivery systems, as well as adult and lifelong education.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report on monitoring of population programmes has been prepared in response to the topic-oriented and prioritized multi-year work programme of the Commission on Population and Development, endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1995/55, which identified education as the special topic of the thirty-sixth session of the Commission. The report focuses on progress towards implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development,¹ especially as it relates to education, population and reproductive health. It does not attempt to document overall education policies and programmes.

“11.2. Education is a key factor in sustainable development: it is at the same time a component of well-being and a factor in the development of well-being through its links with demographic as well as economic, health and social factors. Education is also a means to enable the individual to gain access to knowledge, which is a precondition for coping, by anyone wishing to do so, with today’s complex world. The reduction of fertility, morbidity and mortality rates, the empowerment of women, the improvement in the quality of the working population and the promotion of genuine democracy are largely assisted by progress in education. The integration of migrants is also facilitated by universal access to education, which respects the religious and cultural backgrounds of migrants.”¹

II. Framework and agreed actions

2. Education is a fundamental right enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Yet, today millions of individuals deprived of basic education are still unaware that this is a right that they can demand. Achievement of universal primary education is one of the millennium development goals set by the United Nations and recognized as a priority in international and national development agendas.

3. The International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo, from 5 to 13 September 1994, devoted an entire chapter of its Programme of Action to education, recognizing the need for improvements in basic education as an important prerequisite to sustainable development and as a factor in the development of well-being through its links with demographic as well as economic, health and social factors. This was reaffirmed in 1999, at the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly to review the progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action. Chapter XI of the Programme of Action¹ states that the reduction in fertility, morbidity and mortality rates and the empowerment of women are largely assisted by progress in education. It also specifically indicated in its principles the importance of education as it influences the decision-making capacity of individuals everywhere, and its essential role in improving lives and reducing harm.

“Principle 8

“All couples and individuals have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and means to do so.”²

“Principle 10

“Everyone has the right to education, which shall be directed to the full development of human resources, and human dignity and potential, with particular attention to women and the girl child. Education should be designed to strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including those relating to population and development. The best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his or her education and guidance; that responsibility lies in the first place with the parents.”²

4. One of the key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action states that Governments and civil society, with the assistance of the international community, should as quickly as possible, and in any case before 2015, meet the Conference’s goal of achieving universal access to primary education. Moreover, Governments should “eliminate the gender gap in primary and secondary education by 2005 and strive to ensure that by 2010 the net primary school enrolment ratio for children of both sexes will be at least 90 per cent, compared with an estimated 85 per cent in 2000. Special efforts should be made to increase the retention rates of girls in primary and secondary school” (General Assembly resolution S-21/2, annex, para. 34). This also meant sensitizing parents and communities to the value of educating children and adolescents, both boys and girls, so that they can achieve their full potential.

5. There has been some progress in recent decades towards achieving the goal of universal education. Over the last 30 years, countries which have invested in education, especially of girls, as part of an integrated approach to social development, have seen positive results. There is evidence to show that such countries have slower population growth, faster economic growth and a higher level of social cohesion. However, while the number of people with access to primary schooling has improved, this has not been the case at the secondary level. Factors such as the lack of political will to make education high in national agendas, inadequate resources and poor implementation of quality education programmes, help to explain this slow progress in achieving education goals.

6. The implementation of the recommendations of the International Conference on Population and Development — and key actions emanating from its five-year review — is closely related to the outcomes of and coordinated follow-up to the other major United Nations conferences held in the 1990s. Education has been given due importance not only at the World Education Forum (1990 and 2000), the World Summit for Children (1990), the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992), the World Conference on Human Rights (1993), the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), the International Conference on Adult Education (1997), the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS (New

York, 2001), the special session of the General Assembly on children (New York, 2002), and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002).

7. The 2002 Dakar Framework for Action³ is a reaffirmation of the vision set out in the World Declaration of Education for All, adopted in Jomtien in 1990.⁴ It expresses the international community's collective commitment to pursue a broad-based strategy for ensuring that the basic learning needs of every child, young person and adult are met within a generation and sustained thereafter. The commitment taken in Dakar was reaffirmed at the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly in the United Nations Millennium Declaration (resolution 55/2) signed by 147 heads of State or Government. Education for All is a core objective of the millennium development goals, which designate the first 15 years of this century as the time to fight poverty, illiteracy and disease. The Millennium Declaration establishes 8 goals and 18 targets for development and poverty eradication and for protecting our common environment. The second millennium development goal is to achieve universal primary education — ensuring that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling by 2015. Currently, a third of the children in developing countries have less than five years of schooling, and girls are more likely than boys to be denied education.

8. In 2002, there were some 861 million non-literate adults, with over 113 million children not attending school. The most affected non-literate group is women; they account for up to two thirds of all illiterate adults. To tackle this problem, the General Assembly proclaimed, on 19 December 2001, the United Nations Literacy Decade from 2003 to 2012 (resolution 56/116). The Decade is a direct expression of the international community's concern to address literacy and underscores its importance as a major tool in building a cohesive and peaceful society for the twenty-first century. The United Nations has chosen the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as the lead agency to implement the Decade. In close collaboration with Education for All partners, the United Nations family unites to address the literacy gap in the world — between men and women, between rich and poor, between the haves and the have nots of the information technology, and between those who stand to gain from globalization and those who are excluded from its benefits.

9. Particular attention is given to girls' education, which is enshrined in the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Thirteen United Nations entities are collaborating in support of the current global initiative on girls' education launched by the Secretary-General at the World Education Forum held in Dakar in April 2000. The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative is a 10-year initiative to help national governments to meet their commitments to closing the gender gap in education. It works at the levels of global advocacy, partnership building and programme implementation. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) supports the overall objective of this Initiative, through its efforts to eliminate gender discrimination and gender disparity in education systems. A coordinated response from the United Nations system will ensure success of the special initiative on girls education, and of other education-related initiatives. However, significant challenges remain. Completion and retention need to be central to the goals of education for all. Simply increasing enrolment in school is not enough, students must complete a number of years of quality education before measurable change can take place.

10. Many United Nations agencies contribute to the goals of universal education through capacity-building and direct technical assistance to countries in various educational efforts. For instance, many specialized agencies and regional commissions of the United Nations are involved in promotion of literacy and non-formal education in such areas as general health and nutrition, education, agricultural extension, vocational training, drug abuse prevention, environmental education, among others. Reflecting the importance attached to elimination of child labour, agencies such as the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund and UNESCO collaborate to mobilize teachers, educators and their organizations in combating child labour and promoting education as a strategy to eliminate this practice. World Bank lending for basic education has shifted in content and focus to place more emphasis on raising children's learning achievement and enhancing the quality of education. WHO is a leading United Nations agency when it comes to setting standards for good health and linking it to good education. UNICEF strongly supports early childhood education.

III. Key issues and programme responses

11. Education is the centrepiece of many development strategies and plays a key role in supporting, strengthening and ensuring the sustainability of development programmes and services. In the early 1970s, population and family-life education became a major part of many school curricula, largely with support from UNFPA. Since the International Conference on Population and Development, population education content has placed more emphasis on health education, including reproductive health. Such programmes have contributed to improvements in the quality of basic education through the introduction of more relevant curricula, promotion of curricular reforms and training to develop more effective teaching strategies and ensure gender sensitivity of school curricula and materials. Successful advocacy efforts have also kept education of women and girls high on international and national agendas, increased recognition of the important links between health and basic education and given attention to these issues in population and development policies and programmes. Programme support has also included basic literacy programmes as they relate to health and other programmes, local literacy materials production and teacher training, media advocacy and intersectoral coordination.

12. The broad social benefits of basic education (numeracy, literacy and life skills) include increased family incomes, later marriages, reduced fertility rates, reduced infant and maternal mortality rates, better-nourished and healthier children and families, lower childbirth-related death rates, greater opportunities and life choices for women and men, better chances to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS, and greater participation especially of women in political development and in economic decision-making. In the absence of a cure for AIDS, education remains the best defence against this pandemic. Particularly for adolescents and youth, education leads to obtaining the information and skills necessary for them to become healthy adults, able to make the right choices and empowers them to exercise their right to gender equity and equality.

A. Education and gender issues

13. The rich diversity in the world's cultures is reflected in many ways, including the different perceptions of reproduction and gender, and rules that guide teaching and learning about them. Education about reproductive health takes into account these important cultural differences. Such diversity requires flexibility in teaching. There is no "one size that fits all" in population and family-life education, particularly with regard to reproductive health contents. Since each country's education system has its roots in the culture of that country, the sociocultural interpretations of health and gender issues must be taken into account in curriculum development, materials design and teacher preparation. On occasion, there will be a need to introduce new approaches that may question old ways. This is crucial if the old ways are harmful, and there are many harmful health practices that still exist. But in order for educators to make wise choices in curriculum decisions, several precautions have to be taken early in the development of educational activities. Sociocultural research is needed to identify and understand the educational implications of these practices. Once these issues are identified, advocacy and training may be needed to facilitate agreement on the appropriate approach to teaching and learning. Further research may be needed to help design the most effective, culturally appropriate approaches for educating young people and others about population and reproductive health. The education activities supported by the United Nations system are carried out with due respect to the cultural diversity present in the countries being served. Sociocultural and other research are important to ensure that the educational approaches and contents adopted by countries, with international support, fit the specific cultures, so that the activities are culturally relevant for teachers and learners, and therefore more effective.

14. Education is important for everyone, but it has special significance for girls. It empowers them in multiple ways. Girls who have been educated are likely to marry later, for example, and likely to have smaller, healthier families. Educated women can recognize the importance of health care and know-how to seek it for themselves and their children. Education helps girls to know their rights and to gain the confidence to claim them. Because of these multiple benefits, which are synergistic, it is widely recognized that devoting resources to quality education for girls is among the best investments that can be made to ensure their positive and healthy development. The Special Initiative on Girls' Education highlights this focus. Reproductive health education can save women's lives. Women's education is directly associated with child survival. Educated women tend to immunize their children, pay closer attention to nutrition and hygiene and are better equipped to adopt preventive practices, and they experience lower rates of maternal mortality. Family planning knowledge and use is positively associated with women's education. Better educated women begin practising family planning earlier.

15. Specific objectives of most programmes in support of girls education are to: (a) keep the education of girls and women high on national and international agendas; (b) contribute to improvements in the quality of basic education through the introduction of more relevant curricula, promotion of curricular reforms and more gender-sensitive teaching techniques; (c) promote gender equity and equality by eliminating discriminatory attitudes and practices against women and the girl child and improving the access of the girl child, especially in regard to health, nutrition education and life opportunities; and (d) ensure the widest and earliest

possible access by girls and women to secondary and higher levels of education, as well as to vocational education and technical training, with a special effort to increase the retention rates of girls in primary and secondary schools.

16. Often, assumptions are made about adolescent boys having more access to education and greater life opportunities than their female counterparts. In many cases this is true, yet in some environments, especially in Latin America and Eastern Europe, more boys than girls are out of school and need to be encouraged to continue their education. It is important to recognize that male adolescents are a heterogeneous population in terms of education, development and socialization. Sensitizing boys and engaging them in issues that are relevant to reproductive health is seen as imperative to achieving gender equity, and must be done in ways that are culturally relevant and appropriate. Specifically relating to reproductive health education, male participation and responsibility is linked to the empowerment of women. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has added urgency to ongoing efforts to involve men in reproductive health education and is among the central issues of programmes with the military in numerous countries. In Paraguay and Ecuador for example, UNFPA has supported the integration of reproductive health services and sensitization activities within military training academies and the military health systems.

“7.37. Support should be given to integrated sexual education and services for young people, with the support and guidance of their parents and in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that stress responsibility of males for their own sexual health and fertility and that help them exercise those responsibilities. Educational efforts should begin within the family unit, in the community and in the schools at an appropriate age, but must also reach adults, in particular men, through non-formal education and a variety of community-based efforts.”¹

B. Education and reproductive health

17. There are clear links between education and reproductive health. Education leads to better health-seeking behaviours by mothers and their families. In maternal and child health, education is important both for preventive care and curative services such as immunization and nutrition for both mother and child. For example, visits to a clinic facility is an opportunity for promoting various interventions beyond the health sector. In the context of reproductive health and reproductive rights, education enables women to make better decisions regarding their fertility, about proper care for their children, as well as for obstetric care, nutrition, and overall well-being of their family. Access to non-clinical services and care implies the need to ensure the links between teachers and health service providers especially at the community level and to improve access to outreach services — family, community, school, church. The role of community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that can provide health and educational support should be recognized and encouraged. The quality of medical care depends largely on the competence of the service providers. Education will ensure that there will be

trained and qualified doctors, nurses and other service providers. Medical curricula could and should give appropriate attention to education issues.

18. Education is an important instrument of social change — through education we acquire new values and modify relationships with other human beings. The most solid and consistent variable to increase the demand for reproductive health services is education, and it is one of the most powerful determinants of reproductive behaviour. More than 350 million women today do not have access to a choice of safe and effective family planning methods. At least 120 million women want to use family planning methods but lack access to information about reproductive health services and their availability. Better reproductive health depends on being able to exercise the right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of children. To exercise that right, women and men must be educated about reproductive health.

19. Adolescent girls and young women face risks every day due to lack of reproductive health education that leads to unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections and sexual abuse. Poverty and low socio-economic status add to their vulnerability and increase the likelihood that reproductive health education becomes difficult to obtain. But there are successful initiatives to address this need. Boy Scouts and Girl Guides in the Arab States, for example, have been learning about reproductive health as part of a programme conducted by regional and national NGOs. Group leaders promote advocacy, information and education activities that are sensitive to issues of gender and culture. Peer education has also been successful in teaching reproductive health to youth and adolescents in many parts of the world.

“4.21. Governments should strictly enforce laws to ensure that marriage is entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses. In addition, Governments should strictly enforce laws concerning the minimum legal age of consent and the minimum age at marriage and should raise the minimum age at marriage where necessary. Governments and non-governmental organizations should generate social support for the enforcement of laws on the minimum legal age at marriage, in particular by providing educational and employment opportunities.”¹

20. There is a special challenge to deal with the education needs of married adolescent girls whose welfare is adversely affected by lack of access to health and education opportunities. Marriage before the age of 18 is another powerful disincentive to education. It is also a threat to reproductive health. Early marriage often means early pregnancy, which carries risks for both mother and child. Adolescent girls are physically, mentally and emotionally unprepared for childbirth. The risks are well known, yet the practice continues. Parents make the decisions relating to girls' education and age at marriage, so the need for advocacy and the education of parents is a high priority. Adolescent fertility rates are highly correlated with high levels of school drop-outs, high unemployment rates and low levels of access to basic social services, including reproductive health services. These factors contribute to high rates of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

Adolescent fertility rates are especially high in countries where poverty is a major issue. It is also in these poor countries where serious gender disparities further compromise the situation of adolescent girls.

21. Education of girls and better employment opportunities for them can also mean more educated professionals, and better gender balance in health and other professions. Not only does a woman play a central role in family life, she can also be a public advocate for health values and behaviour change in her community. Educating a woman means educating the family and the nation. As a group, medical practitioners can advocate for youth-friendly and gender-sensitive health policies and programmes. As individuals, medical professionals can support groups who work in this area. As practitioners, doctors can help to improve the quality of medical care, with appropriate attention to health education and counselling.

C. Education and HIV prevention

22. Education has a key role to play both in preventing HIV/AIDS and in mitigating its effects on individuals, families, communities and society. Many lessons have been learned about educating young people early in life about reproductive health, and equipping them with life skills to reduce their vulnerability to HIV infection. Evidence shows that young people who are provided with information and have access to counselling and services are more likely to delay their sexual initiation and to engage in healthy practices, thereby reducing their risk of acquiring HIV infection or unplanned pregnancy. Yet many parents as well as political, religious and community leaders around the world still show reluctance to the idea, thereby putting the younger segments of their population at a higher risk of HIV infection. This implies the need for concerted and sustained advocacy and awareness creation to promote dialogues and partnerships among various stakeholders.

23. HIV/AIDS is reversing decades of development gains, increasing poverty and undermining the very foundation of progress and security. Because of its threat to the well-being of future generations, there has been a fundamental shift from addressing HIV/AIDS as public-health dilemma to a global economic, social and development priority. The epidemic demands a response that confronts the disease in every sector. Perhaps the most cost effective means of HIV prevention is a good basic education that includes HIV prevention education.

24. However, particularly severe is the epidemic's impact on schools and education. HIV/AIDS reduces the supply of education by reducing the number of teachers who are able to carry out their work, and by its effects on other aspects of the education system. But the epidemic also reduces the demand for education, as children are withdrawn from school in response to rising household expenditure and to provide care for family members. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has killed 25 million people; 40 million more are infected. HIV/AIDS has left classes without teachers and has led to widespread absenteeism. In all heavily affected countries, the death of teachers is wreaking havoc on educational systems, most of which are underdeveloped and under-financed and can ill-afford additional challenges. Some countries lose more teachers a year to HIV/AIDS deaths than they gain in new recruits. Parents with HIV/AIDS are unable to provide adequately for their children due to illness, and many are unable to pay school fees, requiring their children to

provide home care instead of attending school. There are 13 million AIDS orphans in Africa alone, most not able to continue their schooling, in spite of the fact that the school can provide some of the best opportunities to learn about HIV/AIDS prevention. Many countries, especially those in sub-Saharan Africa, must contend with the double challenge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and armed conflicts. The impact on education is enormous and can raise the cost burden of the education sector dramatically.

25. Particularly for girls, education in itself offers a measure of protection against HIV/AIDS, reducing risk and vulnerability by providing information and skills, by increasing young people's participation and confidence, by providing access to trusted adults and by increasing literacy. Well-implemented HIV/AIDS prevention programmes can reduce risk by delaying the age of first sexual initiation, increasing condom use, reducing the number of partners, promoting the early treatment of sexually transmitted infections, among others. Schools and colleges need to be made safe settings in which teaching and learning can take place free from the threat of violence, bullying and sexual abuse. Clear codes of conduct and practice may be useful in protecting teachers and students against actions that may be illegal and unprofessional.

26. To mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS on the education sector, concerted action on a variety of fronts is needed. Education systems should provide leadership in working together with the economic, health, finance, agriculture, labour and social development sectors to alleviate the social and economic impact of the disease. Moreover, national efforts cannot easily be separated from the need to tackle broader issues including debt relief, poverty reduction and sustainable development. Among the priority actions that need to be undertaken are: (a) implementing and monitoring of National Education For All Plans of Action developed in the light of HIV/AIDS and its potential impact on education systems; (b) cross-sectoral and inter-agency collaboration to assess needs and to plan, manage and monitor programme implementation; and (c) resource mobilization and capacity-building to facilitate the attainment of Education For All goals and preserve the core functions of education at other levels. Whether the rates of infection are low or high in a given country, integrating HIV/AIDS into education programmes is an important way to ensure long-term preparedness of young people. This could include the development of policies and programmes that strengthen the capacity of relevant educational sectors in the provision of HIV prevention activities, the development of HIV/AIDS content in mainstream educational curricula as well as in non-formal vocational programmes, and the development of pre- and in-service teacher training programmes on this subject.

27. UNAIDS co-sponsors advocate for the inclusion of HIV/AIDS strategies as part of reproductive health priorities, and for their inclusion in health and social development policies. Advocacy strategies focus on affecting policy change, building alliances, mobilizing resources and bringing about safer behaviour, especially among young people. In Cameroon, a book of comic strips has been created with UNFPA support, to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS prevention among young people. In China, secondary schoolteachers and administrators in 15 counties participated in advocacy seminars about HIV/AIDS prevention and other reproductive health issues. A network in Latin America introduced innovative education strategies for the prevention of HIV/AIDS, pregnancy, sexual violence and in support of gender equity and community participation in several countries.

Russian-speaking youth attended theatre performances and participated in follow-up workshops on gender roles, reproductive health and drug use.

D. Population education

“11.24. Age-appropriate education, especially for adolescents, about the issues considered in the present Programme of Action should begin in the home and community and continue through all levels and channels of formal and non-formal education, taking into account the rights and responsibilities of parents and the needs of adolescents. Where such education already exists, curricula and educational materials should be reviewed, updated and broadened with a view to ensuring adequate coverage of important population-related issues and to counteract myths and misconceptions about them. Where no such education exists, appropriate curricula and materials should be developed ...”¹

28. Population education has traditionally drawn its content from different sources, such as statistics, social studies, culture and environment, and included what has been commonly referred to as family-life education. Since the International Conference on Population and Development, more emphasis has been placed on reproductive health education. Specific content varies in response to individual cultures and population situations. In many country programmes, the linkage between population and family-life education is emphasized because the family is regarded as the basic unit of society and the concept of “family life” is strongly identified with the general public in those countries. Population education teaches young people and adults about the issues related to population growth and distribution, how population changes affect them and how the roles played by reproduction, family size decisions and other personal choices impact upon population. Through population education, young people can develop skills and attitudes to enable themselves to identify problems and make decisions that are personally meaningful and socially productive. An initiative in Thailand discussed population issues in a totally new perspective which took into account the needs and interests of young people. By relating population issues to aspects of life that directly concern young people (such as income and the environment), it created a new perception of a topic that was perceived to be outdated, which in turn increased interest in youth leadership and youth development.

“7.32. Information, education and counselling for responsible sexual behaviour and effective prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, should become integral components of all reproductive and sexual health services.”¹

29. Countries have been seeking to adapt population education contents to specific emerging needs, by incorporating issues such as gender, sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS into school curricula. In addition to students in schools, many educational interventions devote attention to adolescents and youth who are not in school, as well as parents, religious leaders, policy makers and teachers and administrators. For example, in countries like Senegal, where population education had not made great strides before, UNFPA has supported the expansion of population education from public schools to Koranic schools, on a pilot basis. This was achieved through intensive dialogues with Islamic religious leaders to lend their support to this initiative. Similar efforts in Azerbaijan engaged the Ministry of Education in introducing family-life education into the school curriculum to promote safe reproductive health practices among youth and to raise public awareness on this topic. Fourteen secondary schools have been involved and 150 teachers trained, with the goal of reaching 130,000 students by introducing family-life education into 3,087 schools.

E. Non-formal education

30. Education refers to the teaching and learning involved in developing attitudes, values and skills that shape individual and social life. Specific interventions may include basic education, peer approaches, life-skills training, literacy/vocational programmes and extension programmes. Like school activities, most non-formal education focuses on reproductive health, population and gender equality. Peer education and life-skills development are used to complement other types of education, both formal and informal. Many United Nations agencies participate in joint activities with religious groups and civic organizations to train leaders/instructors and to prepare education materials. Those activities include, inter alia, promoting responsible parenthood, gender equality, healthy family life, and prevention of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections.

31. There is growing recognition and evidence that as young people grow from their earliest years through childhood, adolescence and into young adulthood, developing psychosocial and interpersonal skills can protect them from health threats, build competencies to adopt positive behaviours, and foster healthy relationships. Such efforts should focus on life skills such as communication, decision-making and problem solving, coping and self-management. This increased attention to life-skills development is an approach that has long been popular among population educators, especially when teaching about reproductive health.

F. Fighting illiteracy

“11.6. The eradication of illiteracy is one of the prerequisites for human development ...”¹

32. The Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, is urging stepped-up efforts to close the education gap, which he calls “a fundamental inequality in our globalizing world” and has called on all countries, as part of the United Nations Literacy Decade, to

energize work towards reaching the goal of increasing literacy levels by 50 per cent by the year 2015. The goal established at the World Education Forum to halve adult illiteracy by 2015 will not be met unless a massive effort is made in the coming years. Faced with this reality, UNESCO as the lead agency within the United Nations system for the Literacy Decade has appealed to Governments around the world to assume their responsibilities in the struggle towards a literate world, and to guarantee basic education for all citizens.

33. Literacy is a key component of basic education. Illiteracy holds people back even in the most basic day-to-day activities. Inadequate schooling prevents them from taking advantage of new opportunities, for example, jobs in the emerging knowledge-based and technology-driven industries. Less-educated people often find it difficult to express themselves outside their own immediate group, so they are held back from moving into the wider society. It is more difficult for illiterate or less-educated people to obtain information about health care in a form they can use. It is in this context that UNESCO echoes the United Nations challenge by stating that “literacy is best acquired in connection with practical purposes and uses, such as building livelihoods, solving problems, and accessing new information — in short, ways in which people empower and transform themselves in their society”. Literacy is a vital, positive and active force in people’s lives which enables them to make choices, to participate and to exercise their rights; in other words, to be free.

34. An innovative UNFPA project in Bolivia addresses illiteracy and maternal mortality in the Chuquisaca and Potosí departments, where 70 per cent of the indigenous women are illiterate, and suffer from the country’s highest maternal mortality rates. Literacy training in the indigenous and Spanish languages combined with information on reproductive health and safe motherhood means that more than 100,000 women and men have learned to read and write in the past three years, and have learned about the availability of lifesaving health services.

35. Education of all children, girls and boys equally, must be imperative in all situations, especially in protracted humanitarian crises where education is often given insufficient priority and where girls especially are frequently even further disadvantaged. In chapter IX of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, paragraph 9.22 asserts that “Measures should be taken to ensure that internally displaced persons receive basic education, employment opportunities, vocational training and basic health-care services, including reproductive health services and family planning”.

“10.25. ... Refugees should be provided with access to adequate accommodation, education, health services, including family planning, and other necessary social services ...”¹

“11.12. Effective information, education and communication are prerequisites for sustainable human development and pave the way for attitudinal and behavioural change ...”¹

IV. Existing gaps in education

A. Financing gap

36. Today, only 36 developing countries have achieved universal primary education and only 31 are likely to reach this goal by 2015. At current trends, some 88 countries are unlikely to guarantee five years of primary education for all children by 2015. Estimates of additional external financing for primary schooling alone run from just under \$5 billion to over \$10 billion annually, and assume that countries will direct more of their own resources to education. A financing gap will exist for cash-strapped nations. Providing secondary and tertiary education requires additional funding. Many countries lack adequate resources to expand coverage and improve quality in education and are especially challenged in providing free universal primary education. Overall tax revenues are weak; education ministries often have to compete for domestic budget resources; and funds are often not available at the school level, where they can do the most good. In some cases, gender disparity in teaching staff affects girls' access to education.

B. Information gap

37. An information gap exists at all levels. Seventy per cent of developing countries are reported to lack the management and statistical information required to plan their education for all agendas effectively. New technologies are creating the age of world networks, ushering in unprecedented opportunities, but many countries are still excluded from these networks. In some countries, lack of good data on learning achievement or on workable policies is weakening planning efforts. There is a strong need for gender disaggregated data and accurate census and population information in order to respond to programmatic needs.

C. Capacity gap

38. Improving the learning environment and making a difference in the classroom calls for better training, employment and working conditions for teachers. Planning for Education For All offers the opportunity to facilitate more inclusive and participative processes that engage civil society and local communities. There exists a rural-urban capacity gap, a need for resources and facilities, and in many cases, a strong need for a supporting environment with positive public response. There is a need to construct more schools to accommodate more students, including new and innovative academic and vocational programmes that are relevant to employment requirements, and to construct smaller schools (one to two room multi-grade schools) in remote areas to ensure access in difficult-to-reach communities.

39. Administration reforms are necessary to increase the number of female principals, administrators and planners at all levels of the education system and ensure the involvement of female planners in all levels of the planning and management aspects of education and vocational training. Gender-sensitization training is a priority. Curriculum reform must ensure gender sensitive contents, relevance to daily lives and realities, linkages to other sectors, specifically the labour market, life skills, including nutrition, health and environment, improved

science and mathematics, education for citizenship, democracy and human rights, family-life education, family planning and parent education, critical thinking and problem solving, education valuing tolerance and diversity and career guidance and counselling.

D. Gender gap

40. Of the challenges facing education for all, achieving gender equality is one of the most acute. Educating girls is an extremely effective way to achieve economic growth and is a top-ranked social investment. Consider the following reasons: a year of schooling for the mother reduces child mortality by about 10 per cent; an increase of 1 percentage point in the share of women with secondary education is estimated to raise per capita income by 0.3 percentage points. Educated women are more likely to send their children to — and keep them in — school. Yet the 75 per cent of the world's illiterate adults are women, and 60 per cent of the 113 million children who do not have access to primary schooling are girls. Girls also constitute the majority of the millions of children who drop out of school to be married, to work, to care for families decimated by AIDS, because they are pregnant or simply because their education is not valued.

41. Various trends in the world pose special challenges to women and demand a response rooted in knowledge derived from education. An increasingly knowledge-intensive society and the growth in information and communication technologies require that women acquire appropriate education and training to function in contemporary society and perform well in a changing economic, social and cultural environment. Global economic restructuring, increased flexibility in the economy and environmental degradation all affect girls and women, often constraining their participation in education. Improving access to education for girls and women also emphasize the need to improve physical provisions in the education system (i.e., establishment of dormitories for young girls) and address safety concerns that can hinder girls' education.

V. Policy advocacy and partnerships

“7.22. Governments are encouraged to focus most of their efforts towards meeting their population and development objectives through education and voluntary measures rather than schemes involving incentives and disincentives.”¹

42. Education requires all sectors. Efforts should establish links between education policies and programmes and poverty reduction. Actions to deal with educational policies need to be viewed in the larger context of legislation and administrative actions, education inputs, resource availability and partnerships with relevant stakeholders. The recommended policies provide the framework and legitimacy for the actions required to improve education for girls and boys, and women and men. There is also a need to improve the quality and relevance of education and training and to link them to the trends in the labour market.

“3.8. Political commitment to integrated population and development strategies should be strengthened by public education and information programmes ...”¹

43. The involvement of young people in their own development is another important priority, especially in the developing countries, where the largest-ever segments of this population group reside. The Africa Youth Alliance, a partnership of programme countries, UNFPA and the Programme for Appropriate Technology in Health and Pathfinder International, began implementing programmes in 2001 in adolescent HIV/AIDS prevention and reproductive health. The initiative, based in Botswana, Ghana, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda, works closely with its implementing partners to build technical capacity and, among other efforts, promote youth-friendly approaches and strengthen advocacy networks, especially with the media, with a strong element of youth participation and behaviour change communication.

“6.15. Youth should be actively involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of development activities that have a direct impact on their daily lives. This is especially important with respect to information, education and communication activities and services concerning reproductive and sexual health, including the prevention of ... HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases ... In addition, there is a need for educational programmes in favour of life planning skills, healthy lifestyles and the active discouragement of substance abuse.”¹

44. Countries need to make suitable policy reforms, such as adopting longer and more flexible school years, making teacher recruitment and management more responsive to communities, expanding the use of local languages, investing more in textbooks and other learning materials, and last but not least, eliminating school fees. Recommendations for improving learning should focus on the physical environment, the teacher, curriculum, learning materials and alternative delivery systems, and adult and lifelong education. The quality of education that girls and women receive is a source of concern, given the gender-stereotyping and biases that exist in school, textbooks, teaching and learning materials, and the delivery system. A key challenge remains to ensure that the broad vision of Education for All is an inclusive concept reflected in national government and funding agency policies. It needs strong political commitment, new partnerships with civil society and strategic support from funding agencies. Education for All must encompass not just formal school education, but also early childhood education, literacy and life-skills programmes. Ensuring that girls and boys benefit equally from education requires nothing less than the integration of gender equality concerns into the design and implementation of sector policies and strategies. The importance of gathering and carefully analysing reliable gender-disaggregated data at the national and subnational levels is becoming ever more clear.

45. Education should be integrated into sector-wide approaches and poverty reduction strategy papers. There is an urgent need to raise the level of awareness and commitment among policy makers, planners, opinion leaders and educators to ensure that population education and reproductive health education programmes receive top priority. Advocacy efforts should call for national education policies and programmes that maximize female enrolment and school completion. Political commitment is the key to achieving Education for All. Public investment and policy reforms are critical. As stated at Dakar, the decade since Jomtien has demonstrated that significant progress can be made towards the goals of Education for All where there is a strong political commitment, backed by new partnership with civil society and more strategic support from funding agencies. These partnerships and strategies provide links to available resources and networks with established capacity in this area.

46. Governments, donors and other members of the United Nations system, as well as NGOs, the private sector, the media, and civil society, including youth and women's groups, are called upon to continue to be a strong advocate and supporter of Education for All, especially girls' education, at the global, regional and national levels. Efforts should recognize the importance of parents in education, as well as other adults who can serve as important role models and mentors to adolescents and young people. Parent education can improve parental roles as the first educators of their children, and should continue to be an important part of educational interventions at the community level.

VI. Conclusion

47. Today's world faces enormous challenges including among others, globalization of production and trade, conflicts and increased ethnic rivalries, a widening digital divide, and persistent problems of famine, pandemics and unequal resource distribution. Education is the common denominator for managing these challenges and ensuring that the world is made stable, safe and just. There are one billion young people on our planet today between the ages of 15 and 24, many of whom are growing up in poverty and/or conflict — this is the largest youth population in history. To ensure that this young generation do not simply survive but can contribute to the well-being of their families and societies, a massive concerted effort must be made. These young people need to learn how to keep themselves healthy, provide for their families and find new jobs or remain employed. The changing world and the shifting demographics mean that the education requirements of the world are also changing. It is no longer enough to believe that we can school the world's children in the classroom alone. Informal, innovative and flexible non-traditional schooling and education must be made available to reach those who will not be educated otherwise.

48. Using the vehicles of public statements and policy guidelines, parts of the United Nations family and its partners should continue to advocate the formulation of national education policies and programmes that maximize female enrolment and continuation at school, promote the value of girl children to both their families and society, and mobilize community participation in support of education for all. The overall approach to education should continue to be aligned with post-Conference priorities and future directions, and

operationalized at country levels through its links to the promotion of reproductive health, gender equality, respect for human rights and culture and population and development strategies.

Notes

¹ See *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

² *Ibid.*, resolution 1, annex, chap. II.

³ See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Final Report of the World Education Forum, Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000* (Paris, 2000).

⁴ See *Final Report of the World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs, Jomtien, Thailand, 5-9 March 1990*, Inter-Agency Commission (UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank) for the World Conference on Education for All, New York, 1990, appendix I.
