UNIT 1 DELIBERATIONS ON POPULATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Structure

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 The First World Population Conference
1.1.2 The Second World Population Conference
1.1.3 The Third World Population Conference
1.1.4 The Fourth Population Conference
1.1.5 The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

1.2 The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)

1.2.1 Goals of ICPD

1.3 The Beijing Conference 1995

1.4 Let Us Sum Up

1.5 Key Words

1.6 References and Suggested Readings

1.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- comprehend the population debates straddling across different worldwide conferences on population;
- elucidate the various U.N. conferences on population; and
- explain the Beijing Conference 1995 and its impact on the population policies.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last half century there have been many changes in the thinking on population issues. At the outset it is imperative to bring into the light the history of the population debates straddling across different worldwide conferences on population and related concerns. The major forces in the population movement have attempted to make the population conferences a diplomatic lever to alter policy and behaviour. To advance their goal they have felt a need to broaden the base policy makers at conferences, involve experts, their government and even non-governmental organisations. Let us begin with an understanding of the different population conferences and their impact on population policies.
1.1.1 The First World Population Conference

The First World Population Conference organized by the United Nations was held in Rome in 1954 to exchange scientific information on population variables, their determinants and their consequences. This eminently academic conference resolved basically to generate fuller information on the demographic situation of the developing countries and to promote the creation of regional training centres which would help to address population issues and to prepare specialists in demographic analysis.

1.1.2 The Second World Population Conference

The Second World Population Conference was organized in 1965 in Belgrade, by the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) and the United Nations. Most of the participants were experts in the field. The focus at this international meeting was on the analysis of fertility as part of a policy for development planning. This Conference was held at a time when expert studies on the population aspects of development coincided with the start-up of population programmes subsidized by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Participants to the Rome and Belgrade meetings, in contrast to subsequent United Nations conferences on population, were invited in their own capacities as experts. They were not authorized to commit anything on behalf of their government but the sole objective was to discuss scientific ideas and common problems and foster population research.

Despite the intellectual deliberations taking place in the meeting, the participating group of nations was not satisfied. Previously, the United States opposed the use of any governmental funds to limit population growth, but by mid 1960s the population control was taken as the main agenda. This approach grew because population growth was recognised as a hindrance to development. With these changes, the focus of United Nations population conferences shifted from expertise to policy. The core idea of the population conferences was now to make governments more aware of their population problems and to encourage and assist them in lowering the birth rate. Conferences became intergovernmental and participants were comprised of government officials, academics, politicians and representatives from government and civil society who were selected by their governments.

Due to poor quality of governance, concerned nations turned to the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to deliver the goods and services to citizens. While donors and international agencies argue that civil society is being called upon to balance the work of government, others, including many Third World officials, view the support of NGOs not merely as an aid to government but also as the creation of an alternative government.

1.1.3 The Third World Population Conference

The Third World Population Conference was organized by the United Nations in Bucharest, Romania, from 19-30 August 1974. This Conference, the first being intergovernmental in nature, was attended by representatives of 135 countries. The debate focused on the relationship between population issues and development. The outcome of the Conference, the World Population Plan of Action, states, among other principles, that the essential aim is the social, economic and cultural development of countries; that population variables and
development are interdependent and that population policies and objectives are an integral part (constituent elements) of socio-economic development policies.

### 1.1.4 The Fourth Population Conference

An International Conference on Population was held in August 1984, in Mexico City which reviewed and endorsed most aspects of the agreements of the 1974 Bucharest Conference and expanded the World Population Plan of Action in order to incorporate the results of the latest research and data provided by Governments. Significant issues discussed were the intensification of international cooperation and the pursuit of greater efficiency in adopting policy decisions relating to population. The human rights of individuals and families, conditions of health and well-being, employment and education were some of the issues highlighted in the Declaration signed at the Conference.

### 1.1.5 The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action also known as VDPA, is a human rights declaration adopted by consensus at the World Conference on Human Rights on 25 June 1993 in Vienna, Austria. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was created by this Declaration endorsed by General Assembly Resolution 48/121.

The VDPA reaffirmed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Charter. Its Preamble states “The World Conference on Human Rights, considering that the promotion and protection of human rights is a matter of priority for the international community, and that the Conference affords a unique opportunity to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the international human rights system and of the machinery for the protection of human rights, in order to enhance and thus promote a fuller observance of those rights, in a just and balanced manner.”

The Preamble also states: “Invoking the spirit of our age and the realities of our time which call upon the peoples of the world and all States Members of the United Nations to rededicate themselves to the global task of promoting and protecting all human rights and fundamental freedoms so as to secure full and universal enjoyment of these rights.”

Whereas the Vienna Conference on Human Rights focused on the interrelationship among democracy, development, and human rights, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, 1994 focused on the need to reconceptualise population issues based on the integration and interdependence of three variables: population, development, and the environment. The ICPD emphasized the need both to reformulate those population policies most concerned with the demographic dimension of population changes and to adopt suitable macroeconomic and socio-economic policies that would promote sustained economic growth in the context of sustainable development in all countries.

The ICPD Programme of Action is more action-oriented than Declarations and Programmes of Action adopted by previous international conferences. The Programme of Action adopted a uniform manner of drafting, starting in each section with the basis of action, followed by determination of the objectives and a statement of the actions proposed. The Programme of Action
is more detailed than the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, and attempts to identify quantitative and qualitative goals that are measurable and attainable.

The ICPD, Cairo was in many ways a watershed in the history of thinking on population. It represented a ‘quantum leap’ for population and development policies as it involved a paradigm shift from the previous emphasis on demography and population control to sustainable development and recognition of the need for comprehensive reproductive health care and reproductive rights. In the next section we will critically discuss the ICPD.

Check Your Progress 1

Note:  
a) Use the space below for your answer.
b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) Elaborate on various U.N conferences on population till Cairo (1994)

1.2 THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT (ICPD)

The Fifth International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) was held from 5 to 13 September 1994, in Cairo, under the auspices of the United Nations. More than 180 States participated in this event, at which a new Programme of Action was adopted as a guide for national and international action in the area of population and development for the next 20 years. This new Programme of Action places emphasis on the intricate relationship between population and development and focuses on meeting the needs of individuals within the framework of universally recognized human rights standards instead of merely meeting demographic goals. The adoption of this Programme marks a new phase of commitment and determination to effectively integrate population issues into socio-economic development proposals and to achieve a better quality of life for all individuals, including those of future generations.

Some 20,000 delegates from various governments, UN agencies, NGOs, and the media gathered for a discussion of a variety of population issues, including immigration, infant mortality, birth control, family planning, the education of women, and protection for women from unsafe abortion services.

Due to ongoing disputes regarding the assertion of reproductive rights, the conference received a lot of media attention. The Holy See and several predominantly Islamic nations were staunch critics and U.S. President Bill Clinton received considerable criticism from conservatives for his participation. Despite the opposition, ICPD received consensus on certain path breaking goals.
1.2.1 Goals of ICPD

According to the official ICPD release, the conference delegates achieved consensus on the following four qualitative and quantitative goals:

1. **Universal education:** Universal primary education in all countries by 2015. Urge countries to provide wider access to women for secondary and higher level education as well as vocational and technical training.

2. **Reduction of infant and child mortality:** Countries should strive to reduce infant and under-5 child mortality rates by one-third or to 50-70 deaths per 1000 by the year 2000. By 2015 all countries should aim to achieve a rate below 35 per 1,000 live births and under-five mortality rate below 45 per 1,000.

3. **Reduction of maternal mortality:** A reduction by ½ the 1990 levels by 2000 and ½ of that by 2015. Disparities in maternal mortality within countries and between geographical regions, socio-economic and ethnic groups should be narrowed.

4. **Access to reproductive and sexual health services including family planning:** Family-planning counselling, pre-natal care, safe delivery and post-natal care, prevention and appropriate treatment of infertility, prevention of abortion and the management of the consequences of abortion, treatment of reproductive tract infections, sexually transmitted diseases and other reproductive health conditions; and education, counselling, as appropriate, on human sexuality, reproductive health and responsible parenthood. Services regarding HIV/AIDS, breast cancer, infertility, and delivery should be made available.

In comparison to the two previous plans of action, accepted at Bucharest and Mexico, the Cairo Draft showed a definite expansion in the concern of the international population community covering health dimension also. However, the health policy fell short of concern for the health of the adults and of the elderly. Major interests and contributions of the Cairo Draft were in the area of reproductive health. An overwhelming attention was on sexually transmitted diseases with more general concern for reproductive tract infections and neglect of other important ailments. Other important ailments are associated with infertility, cervical cancer, certain adverse outcomes of pregnancy and HIV transmission and also have socio-economic costs related to treatment of the disease and impact of the disease depending upon status. Another reason for the overwhelming focus on sexually transmitted disease is probably the growing attention given to AIDS, i.e. its increasing prevalence and its devastating consequences in developed and developing countries. The Cairo PoA recommends comprehensive reproductive health care delivery system. Expansion of services will certainly be resisted by the family planning establishment both on the basis of cost implications and because of the dominance of vertical service approach that gives priority to family planning service over all others.

Although focusing attention on health service intervention, the Cairo document fails to look at women’s health holistically. That is, failing to give due attention to the factors that condition and constraint the health situation and the access of health to women. The PoA gives consideration to this, under the reproductive
health to gender relations’ and it treats it as one aspect of social context in relation to sexual health. However, other aspects such as women being socialised to accept morbidity in silence should have been taken into account in attracting women to use health services. Women’s perception of self also needs to be considered, as women give priority to the needs of others over their own needs. Other aspects such as the heavy work load on women, particularly in rural areas, together with the increasing constraints of low status and poverty that prevents women from using health services should also have been considered. On the whole there is absence of articulation of issues relating to the health of women in the population policy. The population establishment deals most directly with medical interventions are subject to perceptions and behaviours that are deeply rooted in social and cultural realities.

The main committee of ICPD had glossed over the question of equitable development and supported the northern agenda of population control. Many southern governments whose ruling elites now adopt the modern consumerist life style of the north also adopted the same attitude. Southern NGOs, therefore, dismissed the claims of some delegates at the main conference that the conference was a victory for women whose ‘empowerment’ is the cornerstone of the emerging ICPD document. Southern NGOs categorically maintained that the emphasis on population control measures pinned the blame squarely on the women of the south, when in fact these problems stem from the inequalities between the north and the south and exploitative transfer of resources which has led to over-consumption and global environmental degradation. The Programme of Action, they said, therefore is nothing but an insult to women, men and children in the south who will receive an ever growing dose of population assistance, while their issues of life and death will wait the Social Development Summit of 1995. Though development was a component of the theme of the conference much time was consumed by the sections that were bracketed (not agreed upon at the drafting stage). Efforts were made to arrive at acceptable wordings and in most cases they were interpreted differently by participating delegates. The decisions on matters related to development were virtually excluded from the discussions. There was a complete absence of discussion on the existing inequalities between the north and south and the unequal and exploitative transfer of resources that has led to overconsumption and global environmental degradation. Population growth in the north with its consumption pattern is a greater threat to the planet. Issue of debt of the third world countries, that has influenced the global economic system, and the resultant drastic cuts in the government spending on social services and falling standards and unemployment, were also not discussed, it was generally said that the issues of development will be discussed at the conference on social development scheduled to be held at Copenhagen in the beginning of 1995. Similarly, besides talking of the lights of education women, and their rights of unemployment, there was hardly any discussion about the issues of women. And these were postponed to the conference on women to be held in September 1995 at Beijing, China.

While Cairo, like Bucharest and Mexico City, was an intergovernmental conference, NGOs were far more prominent, active and influential than at earlier conferences. At this time, the NGOs had developed a transnational advocacy network and the major donor nations were now relying on NGOs. While there was no great change in the formal process in preparation for the
Cairo Conference, there were changes in the early 1990s enabling large numbers of NGOs to acquire accreditation and participate extensively in the preparation of the Programme of Action. The Cairo process was influenced by the participation of more than 1500 NGOs whose interest areas were development, reproductive and adolescent health, women’s rights and empowerment, violence against women, female genital mutilation, the rights of indigenous people and family planning. Little attention was paid to the causes or consequences of population growth.

The pattern of massive NGO participation at Cairo, as well as many United Nations conferences during the 1990s, has now been recognized as a new and distinct form of transnational politics and policy making (Wapner, 1995; Clark, Friedman, and Hochstetler, 1998; Keck and Sikkink, 1998). In preparation for a series of conferences held in the 1990s, women’s groups saw an opportunity to assure that their special concerns regarding women’s rights and health would be discussed at length in these conferences. Long before the Cairo conference itself, a strategy was developed by them to deliver their message to the entire series of conferences in a way that would enable them to be stronger. The success of this approach was predicated on the realization by women’s groups that NGOs in the 1990s were in closer contact with one another across borders and that United Nations conferences provided a more congenial atmosphere for NGOs than in the past.

The intergovernmental conferences were made to strengthen the commitment of member states to adopt population policies, and as the locus of international policy making shifted from the Western Imperium to a more universal assemblage of newly-created nations, the press, NGOs and other interest groups, there was connectivism in the meetings.

United Nations conferences, including population conferences, at that time became an integral component of the international system, and increasing importance was given to the role of these conferences in policy making. Contrary to the widely circulated view, there was hostility to the Cairo agenda. Cairo as a principle was agreed but the idea that international conferences formulating social policies was not easily accepted.

A special session of the United Nations General Assembly was convened five years (1999) after the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, Egypt, 1994) to review and appraise the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted at the 1994 Conference. The progress achieved and challenges encountered in implementing strategies on population and development were the central theme of this meeting of world leaders convened pursuant to a General Assembly resolution adopted on 18 December 1997.

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development 1994 comprises an almost-feminist vision of reproductive rights and gender equality instead of the old population control discourse but retains a mainstream model of development under which that vision cannot possibly be realised. This gap is highly dangerous for feminists, because it figures a gap between the politics of the body, sexuality and reproduction and the politics of social development and global economic transformation. An analysis of the concrete links between macro-economic policies and the materialisation of reproductive and sexual rights for all women was needed.
Check Your Progress 2

**Note:**

a) Use the space below for your answer.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) Compare ICPD with Vienna conference.

..................................................................................................................
..................................................................................................................
..................................................................................................................

2) Do you think ICPD is a watershed in the history of thinking on population?

..................................................................................................................
..................................................................................................................
..................................................................................................................

1.3 THE BEIJING CONFERENCE 1995

The Fourth World Conference on Women met at the Beijing International Conference Centre on September 4-15, 1995. The conference was attended by 17000 representatives from 189 countries and territories, the UN organizations and its specialized agencies as well as government and non-governmental organizations concerned.

The conference proceeded in both the plenary session and two committees. General debate was conducted in the plenary session, and consultations were made in the two committees over the drafting of Beijing Declaration and the Platform of Action. Over 270 representatives from various government delegations, UN organizations and its specialized agencies as well as governmental organizations spoke during the general debate in the plenary session.

The conference reviewed and assessed the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and drafted and passed the Beijing Declaration and the Platform of Action for speeding up the implementation of the Nairobi Strategies. It identified major obstacles in the way of advancing women’s status in the world and adopted strategic goals and concrete steps to remove these obstacles. The Beijing Declaration, with equality, development and peace as its fundamental theme, affirmed progress made by the international community in raising the status of women and identified existing problems. It reiterated the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and dealt with issues such as poverty, health care, education and violence against women that were of special concern to developing countries. The declaration called on the international community to adopt immediate action for the early attainment of the goals outlined in the Nairobi Strategies. It also called for mobilizing sufficient resources at both national and international level to implement the Platform of Action and particularly providing additional fund to developing countries to help them...
enhance the status of women. The Platform of Action detailed major problems facing women in various countries and laid out strategies and measures to resolve these problems. It focused on poverty, education and health care which are of greatest concern to developing countries, affirmed the important role of women in economic and social development and called for eliminating women’s poverty, advancing education and health care and eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women so as to create necessary conditions for women’s equal participation in economic and social development and in decision making. Owing to differences in religion, ethnic background, culture and level of development, the conference participants voiced different views on issues as women’s basic rights, the concept of equality, abortion and the women’s movement itself. Acting in a spirit of being responsible to the global women’s movement, however, they agreed to set aside differences and reached agreement on the main content of the Beijing Declaration and the Programme of Action.

Reproductive rights that are the right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and means to do so was first recognized as a human right in 1968. The right to reproductive health has been endorsed and strengthened in successive international forums, particularly at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo as well as at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995) and the World Conference on Human Settlements (Istanbul, 1996). The right to reproductive health now includes the concept that individuals have the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health and to make reproductive choices free from coercion.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: a) Use the space below for your answer.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) Discuss and analyze the Beijing conference.

.................................................................
.................................................................
.................................................................

1.4 LET US SUM UP

There is a need to continue an informed debate on the issues of population and bring these issues in right perspective to the notice of policy makers at various levels, i.e., the parliament, state legislative bodies and also the local bodies for example in India, the panchayats. Over the last half century there have been many changes in the thinking on population issues. However the panic of neo-Malthusian continued in the 1960 and 1970s (where demographic increase was seen as population explosion). The thinking on population was primarily concerned with numbers which were increasingly looked at with horror and this fear defined the central core of the population programme. The focus was mostly on ‘population’ and not ‘people’. These programmes
did not look at human development as the need of the hour, but instead looked at women whose fertility needed to be controlled.

This international perspective was also reflected in our national policies and programmes up to the mid 1970s when during the Emergency the family planning programme received a setback in India due to rigid implementation of a target based approach. From the late 70s to mid 80s there was a lull and from then on we seem to have revisited the population debate from the same old perspective.

The IPCD Programme of Action (PoA) placed individuals at the centre of development with a focus on building pillars of human rights, gender equity and quality. The natural fallout of the IPCD was a commitment by India—a signatory to the Cairo Declaration—to implement the reproductive health approach. Post the ICPD the focus has become broader and holistic and different in nature. Earlier, total fertility rate (TFR) and contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) used to be the fixation of most population programmes as they also served as indicators of success. IPCD replaced them with quality of care, informed choice, gender factor, women's empowerment and accessibility to a whole gamut of reproductive health services.

1.5 KEY WORDS

Conference: Large gathering of individuals or members of one or several organizations, for discussing matters of common interest.

Human Rights: The term “human rights” refers to those rights that are considered universal to humanity, regardless of citizenship, residency status, ethnicity, gender or other considerations.

1.6 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS


1.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) Your answer must include the following points:
   • First world conference in Rome
   • Second world conference in Belgrade
   • Third world conference in Romania
Check Your Progress Exercise 2
1) Your answer must include the following points:
   - Focus on Human rights (VDPA)
   - Linkages with POA
2) Your answer must include the following points:
   - Goals of ICPD
   - Debates between north and south.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3
1) Your answer must include the following points:
   - Women Rights
   - Reproductive rights