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QUESTION OF THE REALIZATION IN ALL COUNTRIES OF THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS CONTAINED IN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, AND STUDY OF SPECIAL PROBLEMS WHICH THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES FACE IN THEIR EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE THESE HUMAN RIGHTS, INCLUDING:

POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN ITS VARIOUS FORMS AS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN DEVELOPMENT AND IN THE FULL REALIZATION OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS

Report by the Secretary-General

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We have reviewed the report (E/CN.4/1985/10 and Add. 1-2) and found it to be an informative and useful document which examines the relationship between popular participation as an important factor in development and in the realization of human rights. The report is timely and calls attention to the growing recognition of popular participation as a means of enlisting the active participation of all sectors of the population in social and economic development. Indeed, during the years since the 1974 World Conference on Population at Bucharest, there has also been growing awareness of the importance of popular participation in population programmes, particularly among vulnerable and disadvantaged segments of the population in the rural and marginal urban areas.

The Fund has, right from the very beginning, recognized popular participation as a critical factor in population and development programmes and projects, which seek to engender specific attitudes and practices which promote a greater receptivity to change and enhance the quality of life. The Fund's experiences over the years in its programmes of population interventions has indicated that effective programme delivery is seldom sustained unless there is active popular participation right down to the grass-roots level. The Fund is also aware that respect for and the safeguarding of human rights is mandatory if genuine participation is to develop.

The recently held International Conference on Population (ICP) in Mexico City, 1984 underscored the importance of popular participation in population and development programmes within the context of respect for human rights. The Mexico City Declaration on Population and Development adopted by the ICP stated that experience from the past decade demonstrates the need for the full participation by the entire community and grass-roots organizations in the design and implementation of population policies and programmes, to ensure that programmes are relevant to local needs, are in keeping with personal and social values and also promote social awareness of demographic problems. It further observed that community support is essential to achieve the full integration and participation of women into all phases and functions of the development process.

The recommendations of the International Conference on Population made several references to the need for popular participation in population activities. Governments are urged to adopt population policies and social and economic policies that are formulated with particular attention to the individual, family and community levels. (Recommendation 11.) The ICP also specified that population and development activities should be responsive to local values and needs, and that those affected should be involved in the decision-making process at all levels. Further, governments are urged to encourage the full participation of community and non-governmental organizations, particularly women's organizations in population and development activities (Recommendation 12).

Recognizing the importance of popular participation to the success of its programmes, UNFPA has provided assistance to programmes and projects intended to bring about the meaningful involvement of local communities in MCH/FP activities and special programmes on women. Support has been provided for research which includes: A Study of Some Organizational Issues in Community Participation within the Context of National Family Planning Programmes; Research and Health Education and Community Participation; and Programme Research in MCH/FP, which has a community participation component. Support for a Policy Study of Community Participation in Family Planning Programmes is also anticipated. It is expected that such studies will identify the types of popular participation possible in family planning programmes - and define ways in which such participation can be operationalized.

UNFPA has strengthened community participation through its programme of support for training of personnel from project areas including health workers, traditional birth attendants and auxiliary nurses and for their incorporation into maternal child health and family planning delivery system. The Fund has also provided support to develop strategies for the community-based distribution of equipment, drugs and contraceptives.

Being aware of the importance of the active participation of women in population and development programmes and projects, UNFPA has focused special attention on training activities to increase women's participation in decision-making, family and public life; to train women in leadership skills, as providers of health care and as family planning personnel. These activities have helped to create a corps of women capable of working effectively in their own villages.

To enhance women's participation in planning and implementing national population and development strategies, UNFPA has conducted several seminars for women leaders from Muslim and Arab countries, the English-speaking Caribbean Islands and the African and Asian regions, and a forum on the 'Participation of Women in Population and Related Activities. These meetings and seminars provided opportunities for concerned and knowledgeable women to share their experiences on the situation of women in each geographical region and identify their countries' needs in such areas as family planning, maternal child health, community participation and women's roles.

In order to gain additional information concerning women's participation in UNFPA funded projects, the Fund has supported the evaluation of several special as well as general projects for women, to assess women's participation in all stages of project formulation and implementation and to the extent possible, to gauge the projects' effect on women.

A major challenge for the remainder of the decade for population planners, policy makers and national programme managers is to design strategies to bring about the wider involvement of local communities (particularly rural dwellers, the urban poor and women) in population activities in ways that are compatible with local conditions and needs. In this regard it is expected that the Fund will strengthen its support of activities intended to encourage popular participation in population and development programmes with due regard for the safeguarding of human rights.
