Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS

Second regular session

Agenda item 5: UNFPA country programmes & related matters

Statement of Esteban Caballero
  Regional Director
  Latin America and the Caribbean
  United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA

September 2016
New York
Mr. President
Distinguished delegates
Ladies and gentlemen

The UNFPA Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office is honoured to introduce for your consideration the draft Country Programme Documents for Honduras, Peru and Brazil 2017 - 2021 as well as the subregional programme document for the English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean for the same period.

Agenda 2030 and SDGs implementation:

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and the signature of the Paris Climate Agreement have clearly placed the UN in a new path towards the achievement of universal wellbeing. It behooves all of its member states and the United Nations Development System (UNDS) to find a way to reach the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) and their 169 targets, bearing in mind the means of implementation set out in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA).

The United Nations Fund for Population’s (UNFPA), as one of the UNDS funds and programmes with a presence in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region, believes it is possible to contribute to the more general endeavour mentioned above by finding a role that is appropriate to its mandate and comparative advantages. Such a role is well defined in the “Fit for Purpose, UN Reform Options” document, which states: “Instead of focusing on traditional service delivery, especially in middle-income countries, (...) the UN’s comparative advantage lies instead in the provision of up-stream policy advice. As countries struggle to address crosscutting, cross-government and multidimensional issues, the UN should therefore provide advice, share knowledge and focus its work around building substantive policy agendas”

In response to such a call for purpose, UNFPA in Latin America and Caribbean intends to develop a platform for an evidence-based policy dialogue on population, sexual and reproductive health & rights, and sustainable development. Such a purpose is reflected in the CPDs that are presented to the Executive Board in this session. However, please note that they do so not only through their engagement with the Agenda 2030 framework, but, also through the prism of UNFPA commitment to the implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action beyond 2014 (ICPDb2014), and, in the case of LAC, with direct reference to the outcome
of the regional review of the Cairo Programme of Action, namely, the so called “Montevideo Consensus”.

In all cases, the UNFPA country programmes look into the sustainable development challenges faced by the LAC region with a particular focus on: a) the importance of the interactions of population dynamics and development; b) the consequences of changing age structures, c) the importance of women’s empowerment, their physical and economic autonomy, and d) the key and strategic significance of investing in young people (adolescence and youth), particularly in what is our core business, their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Adolescents and youth:

As of 2015, the population aged 10 to 19 in LAC is the most significant age group. We are talking about 118 million people, 18% of the total population. Such a youth bulge calls for efforts to harness the capacities of governments, civil society and the private sector to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend. Analysts and decision makers are keenly interested in relevant interventions that will benefit adolescents and youth.

Yet major challenges face these age groups. Societies must provide adolescents and youth equal opportunities to develop their capacities to the fullest extent, and do so recognizing adolescents and youth are subjects of rights.

In the CPDs we are presenting, we state the case of adolescents, because that age group has less autonomy, fewer skills and less knowledge to act and be agent of some form of societal change. At times the age group is influenced by ‘adolescent-serving organizations’ that take the role of ‘protectors’ of adolescents rather than as ‘enablers’ of their active participation in decisions affecting their lives. Youth platforms are usually focused on the issues of older youth, such as employment, participation and tertiary education; and leave adolescent issues behind.

As we make the point on the need for policies directed at adolescents and young people we must insist on the importance of an integrated view, including education, health, work, conflict with the law and violence, and, additionally, underline the importance of the right to sexual health, gender equality, reproductive health services and girl’s empowerment.
Adolescents in LAC are engaging in sexual activity with little comprehensive sexuality education and lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services, which should include information, counselling, and contraceptives. At the same time, gender relations are often marked by sexism and violence on the face of which girls feel powerless and unprotected.

Of the menaces that young people face, two are particularly disconcerting and have the potential to seriously disrupt the building blocks of a young person’s life trajectory. We refer to issues related to violence and conflict with the law. These elements are closely linked to the absence, weakness and corruptibility of public institutions. The combination of these elements with the existence of criminal organizations, poverty and the absence of opportunities for young people represent one of the principal knots that need to be untied in order to take the path of sustainable development.

Finally, we need to emphasize the type of population mobility that involves the most disadvantaged groups of society. People that take the option of migrating without complying with the legal requirements, maybe claiming the status of refugees, often pushed out of their countries of origin because of the insecurity and the violence. These migrants, particularly young women and children, are exposed to situations of extreme vulnerability.

Capacity Development for the implementation of the ICPD Agenda:

The CPDs that are presented for your consideration have all been developed in close coordination with national governments and in the case of the Caribbean with CARICOM. As a result of those consultations, there is a set of initiatives already in place that UNFPA feels proud to be part of. We refer to, for example, the National Plan to Combat Violence against Women and the government flagship programme “Ciudad Mujer”, in Honduras. There, UNFPA will promote the implementation of a comprehensive care model for survivors of gender-based violence, through interinstitutional coordination at national and local levels.

In Peru, UNFPA will provide technical assistance to the National Statistical System to support the generation and use of disaggregated administrative records and survey data to map the country’s social inequalities particularly in sexual and reproductive health, youth and gender and will also promote national studies on population dynamics.
In the Caribbean, the programme will particularly focus on policies and programmes that provide access to sexual and reproductive health for adolescents, including implementation of the CARICOM Integrated Strategic Framework for the reduction of adolescent pregnancy. UNFPA will also support initiatives to develop and implement national comprehensive sexuality education programmes aligned to international standards.

In Brazil, UNFPA will provide evidence-based advocacy and policy advice to the government to strengthen sexual and reproductive health policies and programmes in order that services at national and subnational levels are available, accessible, acceptable and affordable to vulnerable groups, including adolescents and youth, women and girls, Afro-descendants, indigenous peoples, and migrants. UNFPA will also continue to strengthen advocacy capacity of youth networks and civil society organizations to increase their participation in policy dialogue.

Challenges and opportunities for country programmes:

The CPDs that are being presented will evolve in contexts and junctures that are not exempt of important challenges. The situation of the Caribbean is particularly important to bear in mind.

The proposed subregional programme for the English-speaking and Dutch-speaking Caribbean covers 22 countries and territories classified as middle, upper-middle or high income yet challenged by their small physical-size and insularity, small population size, limited resource base and vulnerability to natural disasters. This situation is exacerbated by accumulated debt which in some cases surpasses 100 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). The current financial situation is critical and without an integrated financial assistance programme at the highest level Caribbean governments will not have the resources necessary for their social development programmes, posing a risk to the sustainability of gains made in past years.

Likewise, the situation of Honduras, as one of the Northern Triangle countries in Central America is not an easy one to face. They share similar impediments to the ones faced by the Caribbean, namely relatively small markets and vulnerability in the face of natural hazards. Additionally, these countries are marred by violence
and crime, with high rates of homicide. They all suffer from stark inequalities, poverty and weak institutional and policy frameworks, as well as low social spending. As in the Caribbean, one consequence of this situation has been emigration, both south-south migration and south-north migration, mainly to the United States. Inequality remains very high in the four countries of the northern triangle, as shown by analysis of the GINI coefficient and the income share held by the poorest 20 per cent for the period 1990-2012.

In the case of the South American countries, in this case Peru and Brazil, what needs to be closely observed is the disacceleration of economic growth and the menace of recession. The cycle of expansion based on commodity export has ended and in each case measures need to be taken to redress the situation. Brazil is the most affected by this challenge, while Peru has managed to navigate the challenges better. Much of the funding of cash transfer programs, which aimed at results very closely related to the ICPD programme of action are dependent on the income provided by the export of commodities.

Despite the above mentioned challenges, there does not seem a lack of will and commitment to engage in the 2030 Agenda and its promise of leaving no one behind. As you are aware, the XXXVI ECLAC Period of Session, held in May 2016 provided the opportunity for LAC countries to reiterate their commitment to the implementation of Agenda 2030, through the creation of the Forum of Latin American and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development. The forum represents a key regional mechanism for monitoring and follow-up of the SDGs and the Addis Ababa Plan of Action on Financing for Development, which builds on the mandates and platforms of other subsidiaries organs, including the Regional Conference on Population and Development.

Country offices of UNFPA always point out that governments around the region reiterate the relevance of the country programmes and the importance they have, particularly in their contribution to the operationalization of Agenda 2030, contributing to the development and implementation of the SDGs, in particular Goals 3 good health and well-being, and 5 gender equality, as well as Goal 11 disaggregated data and 17 partnerships. During this first year of implementation, Governments in the region have achieved varying degrees of ownership of the Agenda, which are reflected in different government policies and programmes. The Government of Honduras, for example, has taken full ownership of 2030 Agenda, aligning its Strategic Plan to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and committing resources to the achievement of the SDGs, as laid out in national

The encouragement of national governments is particularly important in this new aid environment and epoch in which the role of UNFPA and the UN is changing, particularly in the LAC region.

The CPDs presented today aim at mobilizing resources for up to 60 million dollars, apart from the $16 million in regular resources. We expect those other resources to be mostly domestic resources, particularly in the countries that are in the higher income brackets. Mainly due to the absence of traditional donors. There are important opportunities to work at the sub-national level and engaging with governments in specific programmes that are being pushed forward by their line ministries. There is also a growing interest in working with UNFPA to articulate south-south cooperation and define particular areas in which we can provide technical assistance and also introduce international standards that have been agreed by member states. The private sector is also in the horizon, although we must confess that we are in the initial stages in that area.

Undoubtedly, the pending ICPD agenda is considered relevant by our member states, and we will do our best to respond. Being conscious that, at times, our issues are also part a “pendulum”, whereby progress and regression alternate. The emergence of the Zika virus has put SRHR in the forefront on some occasions, but we also the difficulties in advancing in such important matter, such as sexuality education in schools.

Finally, we must not forget that any development agenda must consider emergency preparedness. The region is under the continuous menace of natural hazards that can become major disasters. Of the 35 countries with the highest exposure to natural hazards in the world, 11 are from Africa and 10 are from Latin America and the Caribbean. Our role in SRHR and GBV in the preparedness and response is vital. Hurricanes, flooding, drought, storms are recurrent and taking on dimensions that are uncommon. Seismic activity is also a considerable risk, not only because of the risk of human loss and suffering, but also the drastic damage it can inflict on the economy. For example, the metropolitan area of Lima-Callao, Peru, is vulnerable to quakes and tsunamis, with approximately 8 million inhabitants and around 50 per cent of its GNI produced in that area.
Mr. President and Distinguished Members of the Board

We would like to thank the Governments of Honduras, Peru, Brazil and the English and Dutch Speaking Caribbean for their longstanding partnership and commit to continue supporting them in their efforts to implement the Agenda 2030 at the national level, ensuring greater coordination with other United Nations organizations and development partners.

We would also like to thank you, Mr. President and Distinguished delegates, for your support.