

About this document

The present document seeks to provide greater technical detail with respect to the principles and intentions mentioned in the previous chapter, to help UNFPA country offices, particularly in the LAC region, to be more effective in inter-agency processes that involve the MDG agenda, such as the preparation of national MDGRs, the formulation and updates of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), and the joint programming process, exemplified by the Common Country Assessments (CCAs) and United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs). It is hoped that the document may also contribute useful analytical suggestions for the preparation of the Population Situation Analyses (PSAs, the successors to the former CPAs), particularly to the chapter on Relationships and Impacts (Chapter IV), where many of the relationships identified in this Guide are analysed at the country level.

To this end, the document will follow a number of methodological guiding principles. First of all, it seeks to be *specific*. As was noted in the Introduction, both the ICPD PoA and the MDG agenda address a wide range of issues. The ICPD, in particular, was explicitly given a broader mandate on development issues than previous population conferences, reflecting the growing awareness that population, poverty, patterns of production and consumption, and the environment are so closely related that none of them can be considered in isolation (United Nations, 1994 a: Para. 1.5). Consequently, the issues that the PoA deals with go well beyond the scope of the actions that are typically implemented as a part of the population, gender, and SRH policies developed by governments or the UNFPA country programmes that support them. In theory, therefore, one might claim the full range of issues considered in the ICPD PoA as the precursors of similar concerns later raised in the MDG agenda. However, while possible, establishing substantive, but formal affinities of this kind between the two agendas would not be very productive. For example, it is true that the ICPD raised a number of concerns regarding education, and particularly the education of girls, and that similar concerns were later echoed in the MDG Declaration. Therefore, a formal comparison of both documents might note the coincidence of goals and even strategies. But to claim education as a major contribution of the ICPD PoA to the realisation of the MDG agenda would be futile because, beyond broad political support to processes and principles, the ICPD PoA has not led to major policy actions in this area, for the simple reason that it pertains to a different set of institutional actors. Rather than systematically referring to these broader issues - identified in the ICPD PoA, but not reflected in significant specific actions in programmes and policies -, the document will concentrate on those issues which have been central to the actual implementation of the ICPD PoA by governments and by UNFPA and on processes which clearly fall within the population domain, even though they may not have inspired programme actions.

A second guiding principle concerns the *direction of the relationships* between the ICPD and the MDG agendas and the need to go beyond the establishment of mere associations and communalities. As was noted in the previous section, the influences usually run both ways: both agendas share a broad thematic intersection and the achievement of each of them depends to some extent on the attainment of the other. In some contexts, such as the preparation of the PSAs, both directions of causality matter. For example, a PSA will normally analyse the potential contribution of the ICPD to the achievement of the MDGs, but it will also try to elucidate the context in which the UNFPA programme has to be implemented, including the way in which the relative success or lack of success in addressing core issues of the MDG agenda will contribute or create obstacles to the achievement of ICPD objectives in the country. The extent of poverty in the country and the public policy actions taken to reduce it are a particularly important dimension of the context in which UNFPA has to operate. With respect to some other issues, such as the reduction of maternal mortality, the two agendas coincide to such a degree that it may actually be difficult to distinguish between one causal direction and the other.

However, in the context of national MDGRs, PRSPs, and joint programming processes with UN partner agencies, it is usually insufficient to establish only associations, e.g. to show how the reproductive health characteristics and behaviour of the population vary by poverty levels or other social characteristics, without defining a direction of causality. Documenting how access to SRH, as manifested by gaps between desired and achieved family sizes, varies in this respect is certainly a necessary ingredient of a poverty perspective, that has to be taken into account in the design of national SRH strategies (e.g. for decisions with respect to focalisation or universal access to services) and UNFPA country programmes. But the mere differentiation of population characteristics by poverty level does not demonstrate the relevance of SRH interventions to reduce poverty. What has to be shown is that reproductive patterns not only vary by poverty level, but that their change will actually contribute to *diminish* those levels. In other words, one has to go beyond the analysis of communalities of purpose and beyond statistical associations, and to move towards the identification of causal linkages suggestive of the potential contribution to development that can be made by investments in population, gender, and SRH. At the very least, this requires that the observed relationships be decontaminated, eliminating spurious interactions (e.g. common underlying causes) that may explain the apparent association. Generally, this implies the use of multivariate statistical techniques, to control the influence of these factors.

The emphasis on causality sets this Guide somewhat apart from the mainstream of current analytical exercises with respect to the MDGs within the UN System. Ever since the MDG Targets were formulated, there has been an effort to define adequate indicators to measure progress in their achievement at the national level. This has resulted in the 48 standard indicators shown in Table I.2, to which some countries have added additional items, particularly in areas such as gender and labour force. More recently, there has been a concern with the unevenness of progress in different population segments, leading to the disaggregation of indicators by poverty stratum or other relevant social differentiators, such

as race or ethnicity. While this refinement is undoubtedly useful for monitoring purposes, it does not address the issue of underlying causes that would help to identify the most effective strategies. Even for the purpose of monitoring, it contains a certain element of arbitrariness to the extent that the standard disaggregations are not always relevant to the phenomenon being monitored. It may be, for instance, that domestic violence does not vary markedly by poverty level, but that it does show pronounced variations by family structure. Or, while educational differentials by income level may be diminishing, they may be widening in terms of ethnic groups. Ultimately, what matters are the causes underlying these differences and their evolution over time. It is for this reason that the PSA Guide that is being elaborated at the same time as this document does not stop at the documentation of trends and differentials, but also contains a chapter on impacts, which is precisely intended to identify causal mechanisms and possible public policy interventions.

Admittedly, to establish causality in social and demographic processes is no easy task (on this issue, see Moffitt, 2003 and Smith, 2003, for example), and while the purification of spurious relationships is a necessary first step, even this decontaminated version of the relationship, if it holds up, does not guarantee that the causality points in the required direction; usually, this conclusion can only be drawn on theoretical grounds. In the context of Goal 8, for example, the Alan Guttmacher Institute and UNFPA (Singh et al., 2003) have argued that the guaranteed availability and accessibility of basic medication (Target 17) will contribute to the universalisation of access to reproductive health. Although this is certainly an area of communality between the ICPD and MDG agendas, it will not be discussed here because the causality in this case runs in the opposite direction. In other cases, where the direction of causality is less evident, this will be noted in the text. Whenever apparent associations may be attributed to common underlying causes, it will be attempted to control those factors. It is true that some of these controls could be improved. Econometricians will object, for instance, that nearly all the evidence presented is based on transversal analyses and that the time dimension, which might add another, more compelling perspective on the causal relationships, is generally absent. However, additional analyses of this kind, desirable as they may be, will have to wait for a future occasion.

In this context, an issue that took some time to decide on is whether the present Guide should include a detailed discussion of the synergies between the different MDG targets, such as the influence of education (Target 3) on poverty reduction (Target 1). A particularly difficult decision was whether the Guide should elaborate on the relationship between monetary poverty (Target 1) and all the other Goals and Targets, which would be justified, but somewhat of an exercise in confirming the obvious. In the end, it was decided not to discuss all of these synergies in a systematic fashion, but just some of the most important or less obvious ones, particularly the ones where the link between the two Targets is intermediated in some way by population processes, or where the Target that causes the effect has a special significance from the viewpoint of the ICPD agenda, such as gender equity and its relation with, for instance, child survival.

Bearing in mind the distinctions made in the previous paragraphs, there are two types of causal linkages of interest:

1. The first concerns linkages that directly involve the ICPD PoA, where it can actually be demonstrated that actions promoted by the ICPD have a direct impact on the realisation of specific MDG Goals or Targets.
2. A second type of linkage concerns population processes (e.g. trend towards a smaller number of children to support parents in their old age and the consequent effect on poverty of the elderly) that cannot or should not be directly influenced through policy action, but that require complementary actions in other domains (e.g. fiscal incentives to make it easier for families to take care of their elderly relatives) or that should be taken into account as background variables in the formulation of policies toward the realisation of the MDGs (e.g. specific focus on poverty trends among the elderly in poverty reduction policies).

Both should be distinguished from those situations in which the MDGs are nothing more than a context for the implementation of the ICPD. The latter will only be touched upon marginally in this Guide, since it is usually more important for UNFPA to demonstrate its potential contribution to the MDG agenda than to detail the way in which its activities are conditioned by the context of the MDG process. Not all of the causal linkages relevant to 1 and 2 can be established beyond dispute and some of them continue to be hotly debated among the experts. A third and final sub-product of the present exercise, therefore, is the following:

3. An overview of the state-of-the art of knowledge and knowledge gaps regarding critical population and development linkages relevant to the achievement of the MDGs, including the conflicting views that still exist on some issues.

A third general methodological guideline concerns what might be called the *transversal nature of population issues* in the MDG agenda. Population and SRH issues, in their various dimensions, were not originally (before the recent inclusion of the reproductive health Target) contemplated as distinct Goals or Targets in the MDG agenda, but to a much greater extent than some of the existing Goals and Targets, they are implicitly present in the entire MDG agenda. This point was already alluded to in the Introduction. Therefore, it is important that the interactions linking population and SRH issues to the MDG agenda be made explicit with respect to the entire range of the latter and not only the two or three issues in which UNFPA has traditionally had more visibility. Obviously the strength and relevance of the linkages varies. In some cases, they have direct programmatic implications for UNFPA sponsored activities in the countries. In other cases, the linkages are primarily relevant in the sense that they reveal insufficient awareness about the important population interactions that affect the achievement of some Goals or Targets, even though there is relatively little that governments or UNFPA can do to steer such processes. Nevertheless, it is important to pay attention to these interactions, as they need study, in order to contribute to the improved quality of public policy decision making.

Wherever possible this document will attempt *to quantify the interactions it identifies*. The MDGs interact with a wide range of social issues and phenomena and it is easy to come up with conceptual arguments, in the form of schemata and diagrams, why any of them may affect the achievement of any number of Goals and Targets. However, from an advocacy viewpoint, the argument is much stronger if it can be quantified, particularly if it can be cast in the form of projections, as a first step towards the analysis of costs and benefits that is a necessary ingredient of results based management. It is one thing to say that population trends affect poverty reduction; it is a different, more powerful thing entirely to say that current population trends in the LAC region, resulting from the fertility reductions of the past 3-5 decades, may generate a poverty reduction effect in the region that is roughly equivalent to 1-1.5 % of additional economic growth per year. Policy decisions usually have to be made on the basis of the costs and expected benefits of alternative intervention strategies. It is therefore essential to have a clear enough idea about the expected benefits of population trends and interventions to make them comparable with the alternatives. This is the reason why this document will make a special effort to present quantifiable evidence that can be compared to data on the potential impact of other policy interventions. Some readers may find the emphasis on quantitative evidence somewhat unsatisfactory, to the extent that it gives less consideration to qualitative studies existing in the various areas discussed in the text, but this was a conscious choice, motivated by the specific objectives of the study.

The analyses carried out or referred to in this document are illustrative, rather than exhaustive. From the very beginning, it was obvious that the consistent application of all analyses to all countries of the region, even if it were technically possible (which in many cases it isn't), would far exceed the financial and time constraints of the project. It is hoped that country offices may find inspiration in the ideas advanced here to carry out their own country analyses, possibly within the framework of their PSAs.

Wherever possible, the document has drawn on the national Millennium Development Goals Reports (MDGRs) and there are a fair number of passages from these reports that are cited literally in the text. In addition, the text includes a large number of other literal quotes, from a variety of scientific and policy documents. In those cases where authorised English language versions of these documents are available, the quotations were drawn from these versions. All other quotations were translated by the project. In case of doubts about the origin of the translations, one should refer to the Bibliography: the documents that have official English translations are listed in English, the others in Spanish or Portuguese.

As the title suggests, the present document is a *reference guide*. It is not intended to be a systematic development of a body of theories regarding population, RH, gender, and the objectives of the MDG agenda that readers should study in a textbook fashion. Nor is it a guide to policy formulation that proposes specific actions to be undertaken with respect to each item of the agenda. Readers may refer to it in order to obtain information on data, analyses, and theoretical perspectives (including competing explanatory frameworks) regarding the population dimension of specific aspects of the MDG agenda, as the need arises. Few users will probably ever feel the need to read it in its entirety.

The relationships established in this paper have been compiled to underpin and guide policy formulation, but they do not, by themselves, suggest specific policies. The link from identifying empirical relationships and supporting them with evidence to policy action is never direct because the latter involves several other elements. Although it provides some policy recommendations, the predominant focus of the present document is instrumental: it shows how certain processes (those that constitute the object of the MDG agenda) change under the influence of others (the ones that make up the population domain). But not all knowledge about empirical relationships of interest is actionable. In the population area, this is quite evident. Many of the ICPD indicators in the indicator overview of the previous chapter are merely contextual and not meant to be the object of action. Yet the processes they describe are important for public policy, if only because they may change the assumptions on which these policies are based. Past demographic processes have created challenges and opportunities with respect to the environment for policy decisions, but even if this environment is favourable that does not mean that countries can repeat these same processes in the future: in some cases, such as the demographic “bonus” or “dividend”, they are one time opportunities that cannot be recreated. The best that can be done is to be aware of their consequences and act accordingly.

In other cases, the empirical relationships suggest various courses of action, some of which may not be admissible on ethical or political grounds, or because of the secondary effects they might generate. For instance, the finding that the desire to form families is one of the motives for adolescent girls to drop out of school might suggest a policy of making it more difficult to do so. However, not only would this probably be ineffective, it would also be incompatible with the human rights perspective championed by ICPD and UNFPA.¹ Similarly, the finding that the social inequalities that engender poverty are aggravated by differential reproduction patterns does not, by itself, justify policies to reduce fertility among the poor. Among other things, this depends on how the proposed policy would reduce or expand the rights of the affected. On the other hand, to reject the existence of such a relationship or its detailed study on the basis of a rights perspective is to ignore valuable information for the formulation of public policies that may or may not affect the fertility of the poor. In this sense, the presumption of a contradiction between “instrumental” and “rights based” approaches to population and SRH issues is not shared by the present document. Rather, the underlying premise is one of complementarity, in that both clarity about the rights to be guaranteed and the instruments needed to achieve those guarantees are necessary for the formulation of consistent public policies. A public policy that fails to make explicit the rights that it seeks to guarantee may fall prey to the senseless pursuit of only a few macro indicators. But policy interventions cannot limit themselves to the demarcation of rights: a public policy that only declares rights without specifying instruments to achieve them – which not only respect these and other human rights, but are also realistic from a public policy viewpoint and based on a correct understanding of the

¹. Under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Art. 23.2), men and women have the right to marry, even though this right is conditioned by a “marriageable age”, normally defined as 18 years old.

relationships involved – them is destined to failure. What needs to be determined is which spheres of public policies pertain to the realm of rights and which are legitimate spheres of instrumental interventions. The population domain, like most areas of public policy, contains elements of both.

Finally, a word on the specificity of this Guide to the LAC region. Although the MDG agenda is a global effort and many of the principles identified in this manual are equally applicable to other regions, there are, nevertheless, certain issues that are particular to the LAC region. As the former Secretary General, Kofi Annan, pointed out during the Iberoamerican Summit, in Santa Cruz, on 17 November 2003,

“Your efforts to implement the first and most important Millennium Goal – the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger – have been thwarted throughout the region by a vicious circle of disappointingly low economic growth and persistent inequality (...). A development strategy worth the name cannot ignore the glaring inequalities between different social groups – and that is even more true when socioeconomic differences coincide with ethnic divisions. Special attention should be paid to the needs of all those – whether minorities or majorities, of African descent or native Indian origin – who share the bitter experience of marginalization. And inequalities of land ownership must be addressed through imaginative agrarian reforms. Some of you have already taken steps in that direction. Since most of your countries are classified as ‘middle income’ rather than least-developed, I urge you not to be satisfied with the Millennium Development Goals, but to aim higher. Should you not aim, by 2015, not just to halve, but to eradicate extreme poverty in your countries; to halve poverty of any description; and to significantly reduce inequality in wealth and income?”²

According to the IADB (2005), the specific priorities of the LAC region fall under the following categories:

- Placing more emphasis on inequality and exclusion
 - Placing emphasis on inequality indicators to monitor MDG1
 - Including consideration of inequality and exclusion in the health and education MDGs
- More ambitious education Goals
- Adapting the health MDGs to the epidemiological profile of the region
- Adapting the MDG3 to strengthen gender equality and women’s empowerment
 - Gender equality in capabilities
 - Gender equality in access to resources and opportunities
 - Enhancing women’s security
- Including vulnerability to natural disasters in the environment MDGs
- MDG 8 – Strengthening International Cooperation for Development
 - Official Development Assistance
 - Market access

² <http://www.un.org/apps/sgstats.asp?nid=644> (last seen May 2007).

- o Debt sustainability
- o Youth employment
- o Sustainable access to affordable drugs
- o Access to information and communication technologies

By and large, these are also the issues that will receive special attention in the present document.

Relative poverty levels and issues of social exclusion merit special attention in the LAC region, in addition to the more general concern with absolute poverty. The issue of gender inequality (Goal 3), on the other hand, has different connotations in the LAC region, and particularly in the Caribbean sub-region, than in Asia or Africa. While the achievement of gender equality in education is still an issue of considerable importance in the latter, this objective has largely been achieved or even surpassed in the LAC region. Access and equal treatment in the labour market, domestic violence, and political participation are the major gender equality issues that need to be addressed in this part of the world.

In addition, with nearly 80 % of the Latin American population now residing in urban areas, the urban environment is an issue that demands at least as much attention as the issues of forest cover and rural sustainability that form the mainstay of the MDG environmental agenda. Finally, the LAC region is well on its way to become a low fertility region. At present, only about 6.3% of the population live in countries with below replacement fertility, but after 2010 this percentage will increase rapidly and by 2017 the medium variant of the population projections prepared by the UN Population Division suggests that more than half of the population will be in this situation. This will increasingly determine the context in which the MDG agenda needs to be implemented, as will be argued in the following chapters.