

[Chapter One and Chapter Two from “Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development” \(1994\), by United Nations Population Fund](#) ^[1]

By: Ross, J. Nalubega Keywords: [reproductive equality](#) ^[2] [human rights](#) ^[3] [sustainable development](#) ^[4]

“Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development” comprises the majority of context within the twenty-year sustainable development plan, International Conference on Population and Development Program of Action, hereafter POA, published in 1994 by the United Nations Population Fund or UNFPA. Given the rising global population, the goal of the POA was to outline the steps governments around the world were to take to achieve sustainable development by 2014. Under leadership of the United Nations Population Fund, 179 countries met in Cairo, Egypt, to debate the best way to address the growing global population and the need for sustainable development. The debates began on 5 September 1994 and ended on 13 September 1994, resulting in all 179 participating countries endorsing the Program of Action. Chapters one and two of the Program of Action encouraged participating countries to prioritize human rights, [reproductive rights](#) ^[5], and women’s empowerment during all future sustainable development plans and programs.

Sustainable development is a process of social change that enables people to reach their full potential and meet their present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. According to POA, women’s empowerment refers to the actions carried out by governments and agencies that increase the participation of women in all levels of decision making. Such actions include the involvement of women in writing country laws and agency policies, including laws involving the prevention of sexual and physical harassment at work and in public spaces and the availability of adequate time off for childcare. Additional policies may emphasize education and services to help women decide when and how many children they may want to have, as well as making sure that having a child does not affect their ability to earn a living wage.

The United Nations Population Fund or UNFPA, is the agency in the United Nations that is concerned with sexual and reproductive health. The United Nations General Assembly formed the UNFPA in 1969 after declaring that parents had the exclusive right to freely decide the number of children they had and when to have children. The UNFPA works to make sure that families all over the world have access to sexual and reproductive health services, including access to contraceptive devices like condoms and the [birth control](#) ^[6] pill, and access to clinics and hospitals with trained medical professionals who can assist with [pregnancy](#) ^[7] and giving birth. The UNFPA also works to ensure global access to comprehensive sexuality education, such as education about the emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality.

Chapter one and chapter two of the first portion of the POA describe how countries can improve policies and procedures to facilitate sustainable development. Broadly, the authors divided the POA into two parts. The first part is the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and has seventeen chapters. In the first chapter of the first part of the POA, called the preamble, the authors argue that governments need to come up with ways to achieve sustainable development with a rising global population. Then, within the second chapter of the first part of the POA, the authors state that the Program of Action is governed by the principles of human dignity, especially emphasizing access to reproductive health care and the education necessary to meet basic human needs and enable the ability to practice human rights. In the remaining fifteen chapters, the authors then address specific ways governments can achieve sustainable development. They assert that countries wanting to achieve sustainable development in the next twenty years would need their governments to write and enact laws that focus on education, women’s empowerment, reproductive health and rights.

In the preamble, the authors claim that the growing global population would soon require governments to find new ways to support their citizens to achieve sustainable development. They reference that the growing population results in new challenges and opportunities, including changing age structures in society, urbanization, migration, and climate change. Additionally, they note that the depletion of resources driven by unsustainable means of consumption and production would eventually pose a threat to the security of future generations. The authors also emphasize the value for collaboration and interdependence on policies related to economics and sustainability. They state that the POA serves as a twenty-year plan set to begin in 1994 that offers step-by-step instructions for countries hoping to achieve lasting sustainable policies, domestically and internationally.

Also in the preamble, the authors argue that countries would need to make ways for citizens to participate in the social, economic, and political decision making within their specific communities before sustainable development could occur at a global level. The authors then iterate the need for government policies and actions to affirm individual human rights and respect the different religious and cultural backgrounds within their countries, to promote more effective community outreach and

engagement. The authors urge countries to pay special attention to the role of women and girls in sustainable development because women and girls had previously participated very little in planning and implementing of sustainable development programs in various countries.

In the second chapter of the POA, the authors outline a set of fifteen principles that serve as recommendations for countries choosing to participate in the POA. The authors state that the POA is governed by the principles of human dignity, access to primary health care, especially reproductive health care, and a commitment to development. They reinforce that two of the key overarching principles of the Charter of the United Nations are international cooperation and universal solidarity, asserting that those principles are crucial to better the lives of people around the world. Some of the first principles assert that all [humans](#)^[8] should be born free and inherently deserve access to all human rights regardless of their sex, race, language, religion, birth status, or country of origin. As a part of those entitlements, the authors also assert that access to a healthy and productive life should be considered a human right, making policies regarding sustainable development critical to the expression of that right. Some of the components covered under sustainable development policies include access to adequate sanitation, food, water, clothing, and housing, asserting that those components facilitate the enjoyment of all human rights.

The authors then explain additional principles recommended within the POA. They argue that women and girls should be represented in all aspects of government, insisting that countries should work to have more women at national, regional, and international levels. As a means of improving the quality of life for all citizens, the authors then urge governments to ensure that both men and women should have access to all health care services, including services related to mental, sexual, and reproductive health. The authors detail that governments should provide their citizens with essential healthcare services, such as [family planning](#)^[9], marriage and sexual consent, and adequate overall sexual education so that men and women in their countries can maintain control over decisions related to [pregnancy](#)^[7] and childbirth. They claim that the assurance of such services can promote social growth and economic progress, contributing further to the overarching goals for sustainable development.

In the remaining chapters, the authors outline how governments can work to achieve sustainable development. The authors argue that countries should work to provide free and accessible education for all citizens, beginning at the primary school level and extending through the university level. Additionally, the authors urge governments to provide vocational training to their citizens who are unable to pursue a university education. They also underline that education pertaining to sexuality and reproduction should be accessible for both men and women at all levels of education. According to the authors, education on sexuality and reproduction should highlight how men and women can plan their future families and any available options for [pregnancy](#)^[7] prevention. The authors also state that the family, regardless of its cultural definition, is the most important unit of society.

In the remaining sections, the authors also argue that countries that have developed medications to treat diseases such as the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, or HIV, should make such medications available to other countries that do not have similar access or means of production. The authors argue that countries should work together to develop affordable and accessible [contraception](#)^[10] technologies such as the Intrauterine Device, or IUD, which is a T-shaped device that is positioned within the [cervix](#)^[11] that can prevent [pregnancy](#)^[7] by inhibiting the [fertilization](#)^[12] of an [egg](#)^[13] by [sperm](#)^[14].

They also assert that countries should work together to decrease the harm to the environment by moderating the production and consumption of different goods and services around the world. According to the authors, the production of certain goods can lead to a rising reliance on natural resources like wood and water, either through the collection of raw materials for the products or through the production and transportation of products that can impart pollution in the air and waterways. The authors state that an important part of sustainable development is ensuring that minimal harm is done to the environment. The authors conclude the first part of the POA by stating how to best carry out the Plan of Action between governments and various United Nations agencies.

Some researchers have argued that following the acceptance of the Program of Action, there was an increase in the availability of reproductive health services, such as [contraception](#)^[10] devices, and a decrease in childbirth-related deaths around the world. Additionally, they noted an increase in the number of clinics and hospitals with trained midwives, doctors, and nurses trained in childbirth and reproductive care, which can enable fewer childbirth-related deaths and complications.

The International Conference on Population and Development Program of Action prioritized the value of human rights, especially [reproductive rights](#)^[5], and the impact of sustainable development. Because of the success of the Program of Action, in 2010, it was extended beyond its twenty year scope to become the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. In November of 2019, countries once again met in Nairobi, Kenya, to reassess and discuss how to make reproductive health services and human rights available to everyone in the world.

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