

The Nairobi Summit on ICPD 25

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the ground-breaking International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which took place in Cairo in 1994. At that conference, 179 governments adopted a Programme of Action, recognizing that reproductive health, women's empowerment and gender equality are the pathway to sustainable development.

In 2018, the Guttmacher - Lancet Commission on sexual and reproductive health and rights articulated a vision. Crucially, the Commission argued that sexual rights, access to safe abortion, comprehensive sexuality education, and support for adolescents to make informed, independent choices about their reproductive and sexual lives—all issues that have long proved controversial—are fundamental to the right to health and to sustainable development. [\[1\]](#) The Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 concluded with partners making bold commitments to transform the world by ending all maternal deaths, unmet need for family planning and gender-based violence and harmful practices against women and girls by 2030.

Reproductive health and rights are an integral part of primary health care (PHC) under maternal and child health. These issues are basic functions of PHC that should be made available to everyone. It seems sexual and reproductive health and rights are kept at a distance from PHC. The Programme of Action, adopted by acclamation on 13 September 1994, emphasizes the integral linkages between population and development and focuses on meeting the needs of individual women and men, rather than on achieving demographic targets. Potential role of primary health care (PHC) in the field of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs to be integrated into PHC and if it is integrated into PHC, does PHC meet the criteria for high quality SRH? [\[2\]](#)

Historically, it may be useful to look at the international efforts for promoting PHC for almost half a century and how health concerns have been addressed. First came Primary Health Care in 1978, the International Conference on Primary Health Care, Alma-Ata. The Declaration of Alma-Ata called for “Health for All” to be attained by the year 2000—a goal that required making PHC the cornerstone of health systems. PHC required eight components (*in italics*) to be implemented through primary health centers throughout the countries. Improvements of the health of women and children, *the maternal and child health*, was the key to PHC success. This was to be complemented by *food supply and proper nutrition* and *immunizations* to further help survival of children. All these efforts relied on *health education* to empower individuals and communities to understand the underlying reasons for ill-health. *Provision of essential drugs* was required for *treatment of common illnesses*. Government was responsible for *communicable disease control* through various national programmes such as tuberculosis and leprosy, malaria and other communicable diseases. *Safe water and basic sanitation* were crucial to safeguard people, especially children, from common gastrointestinal problems, diarrheas and worm infestation. Unfortunately, the emphasis continued to be on illness care rather than prevention to maintain health.

Guided by its values of equity, solidarity and social justice, signatories to the declaration of

Alma-Ata agreed that all people in all countries have a fundamental right to health and that governments are responsible for upholding that right.^[3] In Astana, Kazakhstan on Oct 25-26, 2018, WHO celebrated 40 years since the International Conference on Primary Health Care and renewed vision of PHC – building on, but not replacing, the declaration of Alma-Ata. A Lancet editorial aptly described the state of PHC in the world stating, “Primary health care is in crisis. It is underdeveloped in many countries, underfunded in others, and facing a severe workforce recruitment and attention challenge. Half of world’s population has no access to the most essential health services. Yet 80-90% of people’s health needs across their lifetime can be provided within a primary health-care framework—from maternity care and disease prevention through vaccination, to management of chronic conditions and palliative care.^[4] The meeting at the Global Conference on Primary Health Care was recalling to build on the original Alma-Ata vision and embrace lessons learned since 1978. The vision of PHC that we have grossly missed is to change how we think about health and move away from hospitals, professionals, and disease, and towards a recognition that health is not only about illness and services but also about the social, economic, and environmental factors that affect the health of individuals and populations.^[5]

The latest call is for Universal Health Coverage 2019. A health care system that provides health care and financial protection to all residents of a particular country or region. Universal health coverage (UHC) means that all people and communities can use the promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship. Is it different from original Alma-Ata declaration? How UHC relates to PHC has been questioned.^{[6][7]} especially by echoing the same mistake of concentrating on illness care rather than balanced approach to health; through illness care and promoting preventive aspects of PHC.

It is compelling to note that urgency is to build on past positive initiatives, rather than flipping priorities every now and then to new jargon. Incorporation of ICPD and UHC need to be integrated with laudable aims of Primary Health Care.

References:

- ^[1] Guttmacher–Lancet Commission Report. Accelerated progress – sexual and reproductive health and rights for all. Lancet 9 May 2018.
- ^[2] Ketting, E and Esin, AI. Integrating sexual and reproductive health in primary health care in Europe: position paper of the European Forum for Primary Care. Quality in Primary Care. 2010; 18:269-82.
- ^[3] WHO, UNICEF. Alma-Ata 1978 Primary Health Care. Report of the International Conference on Primary Health Care Alma-Ata. USSR.6-12 September 1978.
- ^[4] Editorial. The Astana Declaration: the future of primary health care? Lancet. Vol 392. October 20,2018.
- ^[5] Ghebreyesus, TA et al. Primary health care for the 21st century, universal health coverage, and Sustainable Development Goals. Comment. Lancet Vol 392. October 20, 2018.
- ^[6] Verrecchia, R et al. Universal Health Coverage and public health: a truly sustainable approach. Lancet Public Health. December 11, 2018

[\[7\]](#) Gro Harlem Brundtland. India's health reforms: the need for balance. *Lancet* Vol 392 October 6, 2018