
REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CAIRO
PROGRAMME OF ACTION (1994 - 2009)
ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS

Within the official delegation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Aruba has played an active role in the preparation and adoption of the ICPD Programme of Action. The Aruban government stays committed to the principles and recommendations of the ICPD Plan of Action to further improve the living conditions of its inhabitants. After the Cairo Conference a Committee on Population and Development was installed to monitor progress in the light of the ICPD vision.

In this presentation we will assess the current situation on Aruba with regards to the implementation of the ICPD Plan of Action and the Caribbean Plan of Action on Population and Development. We will look into the progress that has been made and the constraints encountered.

The social, economic and demographic situation of Aruba

Despite the current economic and financial crisis that poses a threat to economies throughout the Caribbean region, we can state that during the last fifteen years significant progress has been made in the economic and social development of Aruba.

Some positive indicators of the current situation in Aruba are, among others:

- Infant mortality rates are very low at 7.4 per thousand.
- Universal access to free health care through the General Medical Insurance, and sufficient availability of qualified medical staff. When necessary, specialized treatments abroad are available through the General Medical Insurance.
- An overall literacy rate of about 98 percent.
- The participation in primary and secondary education is almost universal.

However, in the long run several issues continue to pose a challenge to our sustainable development. These issues are strongly related to the dramatic economic, demographic and social changes that took place on the island during the last twenty years and to the current global economic and financial crisis. The development of Aruba's tourism industry has led to a rapid population increase, triggered by large groups of foreign workers who came to the island. From 1989 until 1993, Aruba witnessed very high growth rates and was one of the fastest growing countries on earth. During this period, the average growth rate was well above 5 percent annually.

Growth rates have fallen since then. Between 1994 and 1997 population increase was on average still above 3 percent. But since 1997 the growth has come down to about 1 percent annually. However, in 2003 growth was again well above 2 percent. The population density is 589 persons per square kilometer. Ranking number 14 among the most densely populated countries of the world. In the Caribbean region, Aruba is the most densely populated country, next to Barbados.

Let me briefly touch upon some of the areas of concern to our government.

Migration

In Aruba, international migration is the most important component affecting the growth and structure of its population. Between the censuses of 1991 and 2000, the population on the island increased from 66,687 to 90,506, an increase of 35.7 percent, most of which was caused by immigration. In the 2000 population census, seventy nine different nationalities living on the island were counted. Residents were born in no less than 124 different countries. Currently, about 105 thousand people live on Aruba.

The Aruba government recognizes migration as an area of serious concern. Because of the pressure of migration on the local labor market and the rapid increase of the number of undocumented migrants led to a more stringent migration policy. The Admission and Deportation Act (Landsverordening Toelating en Uitzetting or LTU) and the policy of the DIMAS require employers to recruit employees in Aruba first. In 2006 the government started applying a more strict policy towards immigration. This policy was introduced to limit the number of migrants. From 2006 on permits were only provided for a period of 3 years. According to the LTU, new-comers in the group of immigrants of 2006, would have to leave in 2009. For a work permit to be given, the employer generally has to show that no qualified local worker is available to fill the position. These measures were in the first place taken to protect the local labor market. In 2006 the number of immigrants dropped with 38 percent.

Reproductive health

On the area of reproductive health the following developments took place.

Aruba took steps to meet the family planning needs of the population as formulated in the 'Cairo Programme of Action in the Caribbean. The country tries to provide universal access to a full range of safe and reliable family planning methods.

The Foundation for Promotion of Responsible Parenthood, and the Community Nursing & Home Care Organization assist couples and individuals to meet their reproductive goals. The Aruban government is the main sponsor of this organization.

It is the responsibility of the Foundation, together with the Department of Juvenile Public Health and the Department of Sexually Transmitted Diseases to improve the quality of family planning. They strictly adhere to the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) guidelines. Together with the Foundation 'Pro Lechi Mama', the Foundation for the Promotion of Responsible Parenthood also promotes breastfeeding. To prevent unwanted pregnancies and reduce the incidence of high-risk pregnancies, female condoms and emergency contraception choices are available through the family physicians and all the pharmacies.

Despite the extensive program of the Foundation, the level of teenage-pregnancy is still considered to be too high. The teenage pregnancy rate stands at 5.1 per 100.

Ageing

The ICPD plan of action calls upon governments to develop social security systems that ensure greater equity and solidarity between and within generations and that provide support to elderly people through encouragement of multigenerational families. Aruba's welfare system provides a wide array of services and benefits directed to the elderly. The social security system includes an old-age pension scheme, a widow(er) insurance program, medical insurance, disability insurance and an unemployment benefit fund. The first two programs are general insurance covering the national population. The others cover only the employees earning salaries or wages lower than an established maximum.

The rapid ageing of its population is a serious concern of the Aruban government. There is no doubt that because of the rapid pace of population ageing, maintaining the same level of social services will require special efforts at various levels of policy making and program development.

The percentage of persons 60 years and older over persons 14 years or less rose from 42.0 in 1991 to 48.3 in 2000. In 2008 the index saw a further dramatic rise to 70.45. The growth of the population aged 60 and older is currently at a rate of between 3 and 4 percent per year. These figures clearly show the extend of the ageing problem within Aruban society.

HIV/AIDS

As per 1-1-2008, the period prevalence from 1987-2007 for HIV/AIDS for Aruba is 0.4%. In absolute figures there are a total of 405 people living on the island with HIV/AIDS. The institutional framework to combat the disease is functional. There are currently three organizations in Aruba dealing with HIV/AIDS:

- The AIDS Task Force Aruba.
- The Women's Club of Aruba,
- UNAIDS Theme Group.

One limitation concerns the fact that the statistical figures available on HIV/AIDS epidemiology are based on reported seropositive cases. The true number of HIV infected people, and people living with AIDS are not known. The reported HIV cases are yearly cumulative totals. Since some of the infected persons may have left the country, have developed AIDS, or have deceased, the HIV prevalence at any given year cannot be established accurately.

Gender

Based on a number of indicators, the position of women within society seems to have improved since the Cairo conference. The following points show some positive developments:

- Girls do better in school
 - Girls in Aruba have higher school enrollment rates than boys, especially at more advanced levels of education.
 - The number of fellowships and loans granted to Arubans to study abroad is higher for girls than for boys.
 - Up to age categories 30 - 34, there are more women than men with a university education. The same applies for higher non-university education.
- Women are improving their position on the labor market

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- The Census 2000 results show that the position of women on the higher side of the labor market has improved considerably compared to 1991. In 1991, 41.2 females per 100 males were at senior managerial levels. In 2000, this sex ratio increased to 55.9. The Census of 2010 will provide valuable information whether this trend is further continuing.
 - Legal, administrative and policy measures to protect the rights of girls and women were taken
 - As of 1 January 2002, the New Civil Code entered into force for Aruba. With the introduction of Book 1 of the New Aruban Civil Code the old law of persons and family was replaced. With the revision of this law a large number of discriminatory provisions have been abolished.
 - The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW-Protocol) entered into force on Aruba in 2002.

Despite these positive developments, there is still room to continue promoting gender equality and empowerment of women.

Conclusion

In general, during the last 15 years important steps were taken to address the interrelationship between population factors and development. But, a number of important challenges remain. As many countries in the region, Aruba's economy is highly dependent on the tourism industry. Because of the economic turmoil, worldwide the tourism industry has suffered significantly. On Aruba, the effect of the economic downturn on tourism has -up to now- not been dramatic. However, as in many countries in the world, the government of Aruba is really concerned about the possible course of its economy and the effect this may have on its efforts to improve the living conditions of its population and to achieve sustainable national development.