Realizing the Future We Want for All:
The Post-2015 Development Agenda

The Global Thematic Consultation on
Population Dynamics

A Call to Integrate Population Dynamics in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting on Population Dynamics and the Post-2015 Development Agenda
19-20 November 2012, New York, NY, USA
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With the target date of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) rapidly approaching, the international community is beginning to debate what should be the nature of a new development agenda, and how it should differ from the previous MDG approach. While it is clear that the new development agenda must promote sustainable development – the harmonious balance between social, economic and environmental development – little else is yet written in stone.

To inform this process leading to the formulation of the post-2015 development agenda, UNFPA, UN-Population Division, UN-Habitat, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in collaboration with other parts of UN-DESA, UNDP, UN-Women, UNAIDS, OHCHR, ILO, FAO and WFP are leading the Global Consultation on Population Dynamics; one of the 11 global thematic consultations currently underway. In this context, these international agencies, with the generous support and stewardship of the Governments of Switzerland, organized an expert group meeting.¹ The experts² met in New York City from 19-20 November 2012, with the aim to debating whether and how population dynamics should be addressed in the post-2015 development agenda. This is a summary of their conclusions and their call for action:

Population dynamics must be addressed in the post-2015 development agenda because the main challenges of the 21st century are shaped by powerful population trends

Human wellbeing is the central concern of development. Sustained social development – the improvement in the wellbeing of current and future generations – is not possible without economic development – an increase in the production of goods and services – and economic development cannot be decoupled from environmental change including the transformation, degradation and depletion of natural resources. Addressing these challenges will not only require a more balanced distribution of economic resources, which is an imperative in an increasingly unequal world, but also a higher level of economic output. Today, there is a wide consensus that whatever shape the new development agenda ultimately takes, it must ensure sustainable development -- a harmonious balance between social, economic and environmental development – and emphasize both sustainable consumption and sustainable production. Population dynamics have a critical influence on each of these three pillars (social, economic and environmental development) and consideration of them needs to be central to any future development agenda.
The world is currently experiencing mega population trends—such as population growth, youth bulges and increasing population ageing, urbanization and migration— that present both important developmental challenges and new opportunities.

Population dynamics, including changes in the size, structure, and spatial distribution of the population, can have direct and indirect implications for economic development, labour markets, income distribution, poverty and social protection, including pensions and expansion of the care-giving sector. Population dynamics influence environmental sustainability, climate change, and water, food and energy security. They also affect our ability and capacity to ensure universal access to health, education and other essential services. The linkages between population dynamics and these development challenges are critically shaped by gender equality issues. They influence, and are influenced by the rights and roles of women in society, and by their active participation in social, political and economic life. Population dynamics shape and are shaped by developments in each of the above areas.

Efforts to reduce poverty, raise living standards, and promote the well-being of a large and growing world population will place pressure on all natural resources, including land, forests, water, oceans and the atmosphere. More people will need more jobs but also more water, food and energy, clothing, housing and infrastructure, health and education. Feeding a world population of about 9 billion -- which will be reached before mid-century according to the medium-variant of the most recent UN population projections -- will require an increase in food production by about 70 per cent, according to FAO estimates. At the same time, as an increasing number of countries of the world grapple with the challenge of population ageing and even, in some of them, population decline, continued population growth due to continued high fertility is still prevalent, particularly in least developed countries. To be effective, policy responses aimed at promoting sustainable development pathways need to consider the challenges associated with this demographic diversity.

Population dynamics not only constitute challenges but can, under the right circumstances, also provide important opportunities for sustainable development. A rapid and marked decline in fertility levels, which temporarily leads to an increase of the number of people of working-age relative to the number of people who are formally below or above working-age, can create a

“We emphasize the importance of increasing the number of metropolitan regions, cities and towns that are implementing policies for sustainable urban planning and design in order to respond effectively to the expected growth of urban populations in coming decades. We note that sustainable urban planning benefits from the involvement of multiple stakeholders as well as from full use of information and sex-disaggregated data including on demographic trends, income distribution and informal settlements. We recognize the important role of municipal governments in setting a vision for sustainable cities, from the initiation of city planning through to revitalization of older cities and neighbourhoods, including by adopting energy efficiency programmes in building management and developing sustainable locally-appropriate transport systems. We further recognize the importance of mixed-use planning and of encouraging non-motorized mobility, including by promoting pedestrian and cycling infrastructures.” (The Future We Want, paragraph 136).
“demographic dividend” that can positively influence development, because it can lead to higher capital/labour ratios and it can enable governments and families to increase their investment in each dependent and strengthen the development of human capital in general. This “window of opportunity” for development can only materialize if investments are made in the creation of new jobs and in the education and health of children, adolescents and youth. Countries that have been able to materialize this demographic dividend are those that have been able to invest in human capital and create employment opportunities for the increased labour force.

Increasing survival and longevity and falling fertility eventually lead to population ageing. While population ageing is most advanced in the developed countries, it is most rapidly advancing in the developing countries, and in particular in all emerging economies. Population ageing, too, provides opportunities for socioeconomic development, provided that older persons benefit from good health, and that they are empowered to actively participate in economic, social and political life.

Migration often is the first and foremost strategy for individuals (and societies) to adapt to changing demographic, social, economic and environmental conditions. Migration can make important contributions to poverty reduction (directly via enhancing individual incomes or indirectly via remittances to households in migrant sending countries). Differences in population growth rates and age structures influence population movements mostly in an indirect manner through changes in labour markets and economic opportunities. If well managed, migration can be an important strategy to improve living standards and take vulnerable populations out of harm’s way. Although many times migration is also associated with the abuse and exploitation of women, it can also support their economic empowerment.

Urbanization – which is accelerated by rapid rural-urban migration in many of the poorest countries – can also contribute positively to sustainable development. As populations increase, it makes economic and environmental sense for people to move closer together in urban areas. Once there, adjusted for income, population in urban areas tend to consume less energy per capita than in rural areas. When adjusted by income, energy savings are particularly large in the housing and transportation sector in urban areas, particularly when urbanization does not lead to urban sprawl. Therefore, governments

“To achieve the necessary policy change and effectively integrate population and demographic policies in the sustainable development agenda for the 21st century, change needs to happen now. With 2012 being the UN’s International Year for Sustainable Energy for All and with the Rio+20 Earth Summit taking place in June, policy makers have the opportunity to use such International processes to further develop understanding of how sustainable population growth and achieving water, energy and food security can go hand in hand.” (Statement by members of the Global Agenda Councils of the World Economic Forum, 2012)

“We commit to systematically consider population trends and projections in our national, rural and urban development strategies and policies. Through forward looking planning, we can seize the opportunities and address the challenges associated with demographic change, including migration.” (The Future We Want, paragraph 144).
can more easily deliver essential infrastructure and services in urban areas at lower cost per capita than in rural areas. By anticipating and planning for urbanization, countries can address the challenges and harness opportunities linked to urban population growth. Unfortunately, this is not happening in many countries, leading to the creation and growth of slums and an increase in the number of slum dwellers.

There is an increasing awareness that population dynamics and its components need to be addressed in designing new development strategies, policies and programmes. Population factors cannot simply be taken to be exogenous but should be viewed as inextricably endogenous to the process of development itself. To address the dual challenge of development -- meeting the needs of current and future generations while ensuring the sustainable use of the natural environment – international political declarations have encouraged a two-pronged approach. The Rio Declaration, agreed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, as well as the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, called for policies that promote sustainable consumption and production – which is the hallmark of the green economy – as well as policies that address population and development issues and ensure improved standards of living for all people. More recently, the importance of population dynamics for sustainable development was emphasized by the Laxenburg Declaration, formulated by a Global Science Panel in 2011, the Global Agenda of the World Economic Forum in 2012, in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, entitled “The Future We Want” in 2012, and in the recent report by the UN System-wide Task Team to the United Nations Secretary-General on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, entitled “Realizing the Future We Want for All”.

**Demography is not destiny:**

**Rights-based and gender-responsive policies can address and harness population dynamics**

Whether future demographic trends work for or against sustainable development will depend on policies that are put in place today. Whether the world population will indeed grow to over 9 billion by mid-century and level off at about 10 billion by the end of the century, or grow instead to over 10 billion by mid-century and to about 16 billion by the end of the century will largely depend on future trends in fertility. The differences between the former (the medium variant of the United Nations population projections) and the latter (the high variant of its population projections) are a function of slightly higher projected fertility in the latter case, (UNFPA 2011b; UN 2010).

Today, more than two hundred million women in the world have unmet need for family planning. Satisfying the needs of these women as well as future demand will influence future population size. In many high fertility countries, the challenges associated with high population growth are increased by widespread poverty, a lack of a well-functioning social protection
system, climate change, environmental and man-made conflicts, early marriage, violence against women, and other sources of social and economic inequalities.

Rights-based policies to address high fertility and rapid population growth, powered by high levels of unmet need of family planning, need to focus on enlarging, not restricting, individual choices and opportunities: Universal access to affordable health care -- including sexual and reproductive health and voluntary family planning – investment in education of younger generations with a particular focus on girls; the economic, political and social empowerment of women; and the assurance of decent work and social protection floors for nationals and migrants can make a big difference for people and societies. These measures will help improve people’s wellbeing, reduce child and maternal mortality, halt the spread of communicable diseases, reduce unintended pregnancies and contribute to lower fertility and slower population growth. Studies show that if couples can choose the number and spacing of their children, they are more likely to invest greater resources in the human capital of each child. As a result, children that grow up in poor but small families are more likely to benefit from good health and education than children who grow up in poor and large families. This trend has multiplying effects across families, communities and nations, helping to promote economic development, and prevent and combat poverty on a large scale.

Even as fertility levels are falling and population growth is decelerating, populations continue to change. World population, and particularly the population of the developing countries, will continue to grow for decades to come. And while the least developed countries continue to see a rapid increase in their youth and working-age populations, other countries are witnessing the ageing of their populations, and some even are experiencing population decline. The decline in fertility across many regions means that there may be fewer children to be cared for, but because of population ageing more and older persons will require support. To address this challenge, it is essential that countries promote healthy aging, which postpones disabilities and dependency in old age. Furthermore, unless the public sector provides adequate social protection, including pensions and health care, and encourages a more balanced distribution of the human and financial cost of care, there is a risk that the burden of care will fall largely on families, particularly on adolescent girls and women. These gender biases negatively affect the ability of women to participate more actively in social, economic and political life outside their families.

These trends will be influenced by migration and human mobility, both within and between countries, which is likely to continue to accelerate for decades, even if characterized by new modalities and increasingly more centred in south to south migration. In addition, urban population growth and urbanization, which has been a fact for almost seven generations, will continue to shape development pathways for at least two more generations to come. Today, more than half of the world population already lives in urban areas, but by 2050, this share will grow to about two-thirds of the world population. Policies to address the challenges and seize the opportunities associated with high and low population growth and population ageing, as well as with migration and urbanization must be grounded in human rights and respect human freedoms. For example, efforts to promote and ensure sexual and reproductive health and
rights are not only important in the context of high fertility and population growth, but they are equally important and non-negotiable in a context of low fertility and population decline.

Policy considerations

The success and sustainability of development strategies require that countries pro-actively address, rather than react to, these mega population trends. While their maximum impact may be in the future, the policies that are put in place today will determine whether population dynamics can be harnessed to foster the generation of physical, social and human capital, or whether they will be neglected until they become a limitation to future sustainable development. Consequently, experts at the meeting identified a number of elements that need to be incorporated into a post MDG agenda.

Use population projections to formulate forward-looking development goals, sustainable development strategies and gender responsive policies and programmes.

Efforts to meet the needs of people, must take account how many people will be living, where they will be living and what their age and their vulnerabilities and capacities will be. Planning for demographic change is essential at the global, regional, national and sub-national levels. Demographic data must inform rural, urban and national development strategies, as well as climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. To this end, there is a need to strengthen the capacities of the public and private sector as regards the collection and analysis of demographic data, including censuses and surveys. Population data and projections, which allow for a breakdown of vital social, economic and environmental statistics by age, sex and location, provide indispensable information for targeted policies. They allow policy makers to identify disparities between, and vulnerabilities of, people, and inform the design of policies aimed at meeting the needs and strengthening the resilience of people.

Efforts to meet the needs of current generations cannot distract from meeting the needs of future generations. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals, which focused on improving the living conditions of people who suffered from deprivations during a given base year, forward-looking development goals must also focus on improving the living conditions of the number of people who will be added to the planet over the next several decades, and on meeting their changing needs as they age. For instance, while numerous countries have made progress in reducing the share of people living in extreme poverty based on a target calibrated relative to population size in 1990, some of the poorest countries in the world will have a larger number of people who live in extreme poverty in the target year of 2015 than ever before. This
is because poverty reduction did not keep pace with population growth. Likewise, for every person who was lifted out of urban slums, more than one person was added to urban slums. To ensure genuine progress, future development goals must be informed by population projections. It is also essential that countries make every effort to meet the needs of the 222 million women who want to delay or avoid pregnancy but are not currently using a method of family planning. At the same time countries must make every effort to meet the needs of the millions of women who will enter reproductive age in the coming decades.

Countries should anticipate demographic change and set goals that harness the benefits of demographic and spatial transitions. They should also take special measures to protect and support current and projected numbers of disadvantaged and vulnerable populations. Particular attention needs to be paid to younger and older age groups, migrants, and slum dwellers, recognizing that the burden is often particularly heavy on adolescent girls and older women. Women comprise nearly two thirds of the world’s 759 million illiterate adults. Moreover, women’s traditional gender roles as child bearers and unpaid family caregivers and unpaid family workers, combined with early childbearing, high parity and short birth intervals exacerbate their vulnerabilities.

The challenges are particularly acute in the world’s least developed countries, which have the highest share of poor people, often with lower rates of literacy, are most affected by natural disasters and climate change, are witnessing an accelerating rate of urbanization and migration, and are still experiencing the world’s highest rate of population growth. However, the majority of the poor are living outside the least developed countries, and poverty reduction therefore remains an important development challenge in all countries.

Promote and protect human rights.

Many countries are concerned with population dynamics, including high and low fertility, population growth and decline, population ageing, rapid urbanization, and accelerating internal and international migration. Many are already addressing some of these population dynamics through rights-based policies. These include policies that are focused on the level of individuals – notably sexual and reproductive health and rights, right of migrants, the economic, political and social empowerment of women, investment in education, and the participation of adolescents and youth – but also on policies that focus on the level of societies. For example, fiscal policies, social protection, infrastructure and non-financial support systems for working parents to help balance work and family life and share domestic responsibilities between men and women can influence decisions about family size, whereas building standards and the classification and management of land can influence decisions about settlements. Similarly, as human mobility is influenced by push and pull factors, which are in turn influenced through social, economic and environmental policies, there is a need for policies that increase cooperation between origin and destination countries, help to create decent work opportunities in home countries, and enhance better governance of migration. While the experts at the meeting emphasized the importance of policies that influence population dynamics, they stressed that such policies should not be motivated by demographic targets,
quotas or coercion, but by rights based criteria such as non-discrimination and full portability of acquired social rights and benefits.

Efforts to identify developmental objectives and suitable policies must be complemented by an emphasis on rights-based and gender-responsible policies, which provide critical support to the poor and the most vulnerable segments of the population – including ethnic and religious minorities, indigenous populations, and migrants – and promote the empowerment of women and young people. Empowerment critically depends on access to employment and education, as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights, including access to safe and effective forms of family planning. Too many adolescent girls suffer from child marriage, early and unintended pregnancies, harmful sexual practices and sexual abuse; too many are exposed to communicable diseases; too many drop out of school; and too many get stuck in a vicious cycle of poverty.

**Promote human development throughout the life course.**

The nature of demographic change is strongly influenced by the development of human capital. Human capital development is an important end in itself, as well as a crucial mean to sustainable development pathways. However, efforts to strengthen human capital should not only focus on early phases in life, but should rather extend throughout the course of life into old age. Health and education are critical assets for younger people, but are no less important for people in all other age groups.

Strategies to provide a continuum of care and support should be informed by the needs of women and men of all ages. But it is important to recognize that the needs of people do not only change with age and sex, but also with location, income level, and evolving personal preferences and expectations. Social protection, including access to essential health care, reduces disparities, empowers women, as well as migrants and their children, and contributes to human development throughout the life-course.

Investment in people throughout their life course, as well as appropriate levels of intergenerational support, will build and maintain the capacity of people to contribute to society at all ages, and can help to address for example challenges associated with the aging of populations.
Background of meeting

As we approach the target year of the Millennium Development Goals, 2015, the international community is seeking to formulate a new agenda for development. The declared objective of the post-2015 development is to ensure sustainable development pathways. This objective was set out in the outcome document of United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012, entitled “The Future We Want”, and it was reaffirmed by the recent report of the UN System Wide Task Team to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the post-2015 development agenda, entitled “Realizing the Future We Want for All”.

International agencies are supporting these efforts through coordinated analysis and advice in critical areas of sustainable development. The expert group meeting that took place from 19-20 November 2012 was the first in a series of global consultations on population dynamics and the post-2015 development agenda. The objective of this consultation is to solicit views and inputs by academics, civil society, the private sector and policy makers, as well as the public at large on whether and how population dynamics should be integrated in the new development agenda. This global consultation, which benefits from the generous support and stewardship of the Government of Switzerland, is led by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), UN Habitat and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in close collaboration with other divisions of UN DESA, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Labour Office (ILO), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UN Women, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNAIDS. Please add your voice to the conversation by participating in the global e-consultation: www.worldwewant2015.org/population

List of participants

| Aboderin, Isabella | Eloundou-Enyegue, Parfait | May, John |
| Andersson, Patrik | Giorguli Saucedo, Silvia Elena | Montgomery, Mark |
| Akhtar, Shamshad | Godenzi, Beata | Muenz, Rainer |
| Basu, Alaka | Guzman, Jose Miguel | Pelaez, Enrique (by skype) |
| Beard, John | Halfani, Mohamed | Perucci, Francesca |
| Black, Richard | Hardee, Karen | Pochron-Frankoski, Leszek |
| Bernstein, Stan | Herrmann, Michael | Rashad, Hoda |
| Bongaarts, John | Hinz, Catherina | Richter, Chris |
| Bravo, Jorge | Hugo, Graeme | Schellekens, Saskia |
| Buckley, Robert | Jaspers-Faijer, Dirk | Sclar, Elliott |
| Castilho, Leonardo | Jimenez, Emmanuel (by skype) | Skeldon, Ronald |
| Cohen, Barney | Lane, Rosemary | Soda, Federico |
| Cohen, Sylvie | Lonnback, Lars Johan | Veron, Jacques |
| Das Gupta, Monica | Kühn, Thierry | Wickramasekara, Piyasiri |
| Djacta, Yamita | Lutz, Brian | |
| Drouin, Anne | Mason, Andrew | |
| Dyson, Tim | Matheson, Lea | |