UN SYSTEM TASK TEAM ON THE POST-2015 UN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Population dynamics

Thematic Think Piece

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Following on the outcome of the 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, the United Nations Secretary-General established the UN System Task Team in September 2011 to support UN system-wide preparations for the post-2015 UN development agenda, in consultation with all stakeholders. The Task Team is led by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme and brings together senior experts from over 50 UN entities and international organizations to provide system-wide support to the post-2015 consultation process, including analytical input, expertise and outreach.

Population dynamics

1. Relevance

The global population has increased by two billion over the last 25 years, surpassing the 7 billion mark in late 2011. It is likely to increase by at least another two billion by 2050. Beyond the sheer numbers, the world is faced with unprecedented diversity in demographic situations across countries and regions, as well as within countries. Such diversity is mostly found in evolving demographic structures and the changing proportions of youth and elderly groups, and in different rates of fertility, morbidity and mortality, population growth, urbanization, and internal and international migration.

In addition, there are persistent inequalities of income and opportunity within and across countries and regions. Such inequalities are often associated with aspects such as age, gender, ethnicity and race. National averages, which may show improvements at the country level, often hide severe sub-national disparities in economic opportunities and access to basic social and health services, including reproductive health services.

Population dynamics, particularly in the context of persistent inequalities, will have major influence on development processes and on the inclusive and balanced growth and outcomes in the coming decades. They also challenge the capacity of countries to achieve broad-based development goals.

2. Why should population issues be part of the post-2015 development agenda

Population dynamics -- including changes in population growth rates, age structures and distributions of people -- are closely linked to national and global developmental challenges and their solutions. Indeed, none of the greatest challenges of our time can be resolved without attention to population dynamics. Much of the projected growth in population in coming decades will take place in developing and the least developed countries, where it is likely to exacerbate poverty and add pressure on the economy, basic health and social

services and the environment. Though mortality has been declining and people are living longer in all countries of the world, many developing countries continue to have high fertility, unacceptably high rates of morbidity and mortality and low life expectancy that hinder development. In the developed and middle-income countries with low fertility, population numbers are likely to remain stable or even decline. These countries will experience shrinking working-age populations and rapid population ageing.

Demographic changes in the past decades have led to the largest generation of youth in the world today. Globally there were 1.2 billion young people aged 15–24 in 2010. High-fertility countries in sub-Saharan Africa are projected to experience a rapid increase in the population aged 15–24, from 173 million at present to 362 million by mid-century. Conversely, the youth population in the more developed countries has been declining in both absolute numbers and in proportion to older adults, with implications for labour supply and old-age support ratios. Young people are the custodians of the future and can be at the forefront of technological innovation and social transformation if provided with quality education and decent job opportunities.

Ageing is another major outcome of demographic change resulting from fertility decline and increased longevity. The number and proportion of older persons aged 60 years or over are rising in all countries. Globally, the number of older persons aged 60 years or over is projected to increase from 810 million now to more than 2 billion in 2050. Older persons are the world's fastest growing population group, amid rapidly changing family structures and declining family support systems. This global trend of ageing populations has major implications for social security, health care systems, protecting older people's rights and interests and associated development strategies.

More than half of the world population already lives in urban areas and, as development continues, urbanization is certain to increase. Nearly all of the world's population growth in the coming decades is projected to occur in the cities and towns of developing countries. Urbanization, if well planned, has the potential to improve people's access to education, health, housing, and other services and to expand their opportunities for economic productivity. However, urban population growth also presents challenges for urban

planning and good governance, particularly when that growth is rapid and countries and localities are not prepared for it.

Migration flows and patterns are primarily driven by economic disparities, facilitated by low-cost transportation, improved communication and migrant networks. Migration can also be driven by political instability or conflict, natural or man-made disasters, including environmental degradation or chemical or nuclear disasters and famine or even development projects. The global stock of international migrants increased from 156 million in 1990 to 214 million in 2010, and this rising trend is likely to continue in the foreseeable future. Migration policies and international cooperation play an important role in determining the flows and the conditions of integration of migrants in destination countries, as well as their contributions to the countries of origin.

Current population challenges are not only about population numbers but also about polarization of abundance and deprivation–that is, inequalities. Indeed five per cent of the world population use 23 per cent of the entire supply of energy, while roughly 40 per cent of the world population lack access to adequate sanitation services, with another 1.2 billion people having no facilities at all. In addition, this reality is no longer about the least developed countries alone. More than 70 percent of the world's poorest people live today in middle-income countries.

Whenever population pressures are associated with resource constraints or environmental degradation, the poorest segments of the population—who rely on access to natural resources and are living in or migrating between vulnerable places—suffer the most. Those at greatest risk due to these factors include women, young girls and children, particularly in contexts marked by gender imbalances and ethnic or racial disparities, as well as cyclical and seasonal migrants and older persons who do not have minimum social safety nets.

People living in constraining environments—particularly in vulnerable families, remote and underserved communities—face conditions that tend to perpetuate the vicious cycle of poverty, lack of education, ill health, low human capital, low economic productivity, poor reproductive health, high fertility, and high infant mortality, maternal mortality and

morbidity. In addition, in many countries, relatively weak negotiation and bargaining power of women in the family and their lower status in the community at large limits their access to information and resources – including access to adequate reproductive health services and information about reproductive rights, hinders their participation in decision making, restricts their physical and social mobility, and hampers their well-being and potential contributions to development.

3. Possible Ways to Bring Population Issues into the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Population issues should be an integral part of the post-2015 development agenda from a two-pronged perspective: a) evolving population dynamics, including changing population structures and distributions, as they have tremendous bearing on macro social and economic development processes and outcomes, and b) access to reproductive health and protection of reproductive rights as they represent a critical challenge for achieving a dignifying human development and well-being for all. While the first set of issues i.e., population dynamics and changing demographic structures can be construed largely as cross-cutting, enabling factors for post-2015 development goals, the second set of issues i.e., access to quality reproductive health services and protection of reproductive rights should be included in and monitored through clear development goal and target frameworks.

Population dynamics

Rapid population growth can magnify every problem that is scaled by population numbers. Slowing that growth therefore can contribute to easing pressure on ecosystems and natural resources, facilitate the management of land and water resources, and improve the chances of achieving a more equitable distribution of energy, particularly in urban areas. Actions taken by Governments in the coming years will be crucial in shaping future population trends.

Ensuring appropriate investments in young people should be an essential component of the broader global development agenda. A post-2015 development agenda should consider adopting measurable targets regarding achieving better education, sustainable job creation,

and the removal of barriers to accessing reproductive health services for improving young people's opportunities and their wellbeing, and for maximizing their contributions to society.

A post-2015 development agenda should account for a progressively and rapidly ageing world by promoting healthy ageing and economic well-being in old age, and by providing enabling and supportive environments where older persons are integrated into the development process as an asset rather than a burden. Inequalities faced by older persons should be addressed through policies to foster (i) full, productive and remunerative employment, (ii) life cycle savings, and (iii) progressive social transfers, in forms suitable to country contexts. The development agenda should consider relevant specific goals on social security coverage and fiscal and generational sustainability of pension and health care systems, as well as measurable targets for improvements in health status among older people.

A post-2015 development agenda should also prioritize planning for future urban growth, including appropriate infrastructure and access to basic education, health, and other services, so that countries can reap the benefits of economies of scale and greater efficiency, as well as ensure that urban trajectories are beneficial to all urban residents.

One specific area of concern is vulnerable populations that are at risk of displacement or whose livelihoods are threatened due to climatic changes in environmentally fragile areas. The development agenda should pay particular attention to identifying such populations, and invest in reducing their vulnerability and enhancing their adaptive capacity, including planning for potential migration and relocation of people.

In an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, the global development agenda must ensure international dialogue and cooperation on migration between sending and receiving countries, to ensure that migration occurs in safe and legal conditions, with full respect for human rights, and strengthens the mechanisms that enable migrants to contribute to development in both origin and destination countries. In particular, the economic contributions of migrants to origin countries, including remittances and the

issuance and utilization of "diaspora bonds", should be strengthened, and the adverse consequences, such as discrimination in destination countries, should be addressed.

Access to reproductive health and protection of reproductive rights

Reproductive health status, processes and outcomes in a given country are affected by norms regarding marriage, childbearing and sexuality, as well as by women's educational and economic status and ethnic background. Reproductive health is also influenced by the capacity of the health system to provide access to comprehensive, quality reproductive health information and services, as a basic human right to all.

Overall, there is evidence of progress in access to quality reproductive health information and services, but many poor and less-educated women, especially adolescents and young girls in developing countries, continue to lag behind with poor access and high demand for such services. In addition, inequalities in access to reproductive health information and services persist both within and across countries, illustrated by the fact that an estimated 39 per cent of births in developing countries take place without skilled attendance. Moreover, an estimated 226 million women in developing countries lack access to modern contraceptive methods, and worldwide approximately 40 per cent of pregnancies are unintended.

In many countries, access to quality reproductive health information and services is hindered by prevailing adverse attitudes and practices such as honor crimes, sexual coercion and violence, female genital mutilation/cutting, pre-birth sex selection, rape, restrictions on women's mobility in seeking health services, seclusion, and forced/child marriages among others. In addition, domestic and gender-based violence continues to be either tolerated or unreported and largely unchecked with few systematic social and legal provisions to bring perpetrators to task. This further compromises women's ability to seek and obtain reproductive health information and services.

Meanwhile, in many developing countries, appropriate policies and institutions capable of implementing programmes to ensure universal access to reproductive health, and to protect the reproductive rights, particularly for the poor, less-educated and other marginalized

groups are often lacking. Adequate policies and institutions capable of addressing gender-related barriers to reproductive health, including violence against women, are also lacking in some countries.

Intensified efforts will be required to ensure equal and sustained access to quality reproductive health services, promoting gender equality and empowering women, reducing infant, child and maternal mortality and improving maternal health. Efforts are also required to equip women, men and young people with timely information and with the appropriate individual and institutional capacity to exercise their right to reproductive health. Efforts are finally required to reduce structural and system inequalities in accessing quality reproductive health and other social services. This is central to development and certainly central to ending poverty and should therefore be reflected in development targets and sub-targets. Improving access to reproductive health services and protection of reproductive rights will have a spin off effect of resulting in balanced population and development.

4. Context in which relevant issues should be highlighted

The global development agenda should recognize the diversity of demographic situations and its varied implications for human wellbeing and sustainable development. In the years ahead, Governments and the international community need to address the development consequences of population dynamics before they unfold, adopting forward-looking and pro-active planning based on foreseeable demographic trends and projections. The extent to which these plans and strategies are based on or coordinated with informed population policies can in fact be an indicator of accounting for population dynamics as a cross-cutting, enabling factor. This can also be a concrete way of tracking progress.

Documented experiences from a range of countries have shown that change in fertility patterns are associated with girls' and women's education, availability of reproductive health information and services, upholding and protecting reproductive rights, opportunities for integration into the labour market and equal opportunity social and

economic development. These conditions ultimately lead to positive changes in girls' and women's status, health-seeking behavior and participation in productive activities and the society at large.

Considering the benefits of integrating demographic data and projections into development planning, investing in data and research is a critical step to improving our understanding of factors influencing demographic dynamics and reproductive health processes and outcomes among different population groups. Some important development goals, such as addressing disparities and inequalities, also need disaggregated population data, as well as appropriate analyses to design and implement effective development strategies and monitor programme performance and impact.

While addressing population challenges should be the primary responsibility of Governments, it also requires a joint effort of all stakeholders, including in the UN system. The task ahead cannot be tackled by one agency alone, but requires consistent and concerted actions of all partner organizations. The post-2015 development agenda presents an opportunity to work collaboratively within the UN system to integrate analysis of and response to population dynamics and reproductive health challenges in a common forward-looking vision of sustainable development.

This agenda calls for partnership-based development assistance, which would incorporate States, private businesses, civil society organizations, academics, media and opinion leaders. To ensure coherence of the development agenda and effectiveness of the respective partnership, the set of goals must be rationalized and manageable. Consequently, the goals combined in clusters may be preferable.

The post-2015 development agenda should not entail articulating prescriptive, one-size-fits-all strategies because any strategy must be adapted to the country context in order to be effective. Indeed, approaches that have proven to yield results in the past are proactive, evidence-based, integrated with addressing other economic and social challenges, and directing individual choices and opportunities through people's empowerment rather than through controls.

UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda

Membership

Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Co-Chair

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Co-Chair

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Department of Public Information (DPI)

Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG)

Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Global Environment Facility (GEF)

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)

Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS)

Office of the Deputy Secretary-General (ODSG)

Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OHRLLS)

Office of the Special Advisor on Africa (OSAA)

Peace building Support Office (PBSO)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women)

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

United Nations Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP)

United Nations Global Compact Office

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)

United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR)

United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)

United Nations Millennium Campaign

United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA)

United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)

United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination Secretariat (CEB)

United Nations University (UNU)

United Nations Volunteers (UNV)

United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

Universal Postal Union (UPU)

World Bank

World Food Programme (WFP)

World Health Organization (WHO)

World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)

World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

World Trade Organization (WTO)