



UNFPA

state of world population 2002


people, poverty and possibilities



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people, poverty and possibilities:
making development work for the poor

The background of the entire page is a faded, sepia-toned photograph of three children in a grassy field. One child is in the foreground on the left, looking towards the camera. Two other children are further back, walking away from the camera towards the right. The field is tall grass, and there are trees in the distance.

“Development has often bypassed the poorest people, and has even increased their disadvantages. The poor need direct action to bring them into the development process and create the conditions for them to escape from poverty.”

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1 overview



Introduction

Attacking poverty directly—as a matter of human rights, to accelerate development and to reduce inequality within and among nations—has become an urgent global priority. World leaders have agreed on a variety of new initiatives, including the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This year's *State of World Population* report is a contribution to the discussion and a guide to action.

The number of people (3 billion) living on \$2 a day or less' is the same as additions to world population since 1960. Of course, the relationship is not direct, but population cannot be ignored in the discussion about poverty and how to end it.

- Fertility and population growth are highest in the poorest countries. The least-developed countries will most likely triple their populations by 2050, from 600 million in 1995 to 1.8 billion.²
- Population age structures have an impact on development: a high proportion of young dependents holds back economic growth.
- Urban growth is fastest among poor populations. Many of the new urban migrants are very poor, driven by environmental collapse or economic hopes or hardship.

Development has often bypassed the poorest people, and has even increased their disadvantages. The poor need direct action to bring them into the development process and create the conditions for them to escape from poverty.

The world's nations agreed as long ago as 1994 that population and development work is central to this purpose. The 1994 Inter-

national Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) addressed population and reproductive health concerns within a broad development framework, stressing the need to incorporate diverse population issues—including growth, location, age distribution and movement, and their evolving dynamics—in addressing issues of sustainable development.

The ICPD adopted important goals, including better reproductive health, universal education and gender equality, all within the context of human rights.³ Work towards these goals fits seamlessly into the MDGs, and reinforces progress towards them.

Work towards population goals helps reduce poverty in several ways. Two of the most important:

- Slower population growth has encouraged overall economic growth in developing countries.⁴ Since 1970, developing countries with lower fertility and slower population growth have seen higher productivity, more savings and more productive investment. Incomes, the usual measure of poverty, have risen across the board.
- Incomes do not tell the whole story. Successful developing countries have also invested in universal health care, including reproductive health, and education. They have moved to reduce gender inequality and remove obstacles to women's participation in the wider society. These social investments promote human rights. They improve human well-being, help close the gaps between the poor and the better off, and reduce the disadvantages under which poor people labour. Poor people themselves measure the quality of their lives in this broader way.

Chapter 2 looks at ways to describe and measure poverty.

I **ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY** The world economic situation poses challenges to progress towards the MDGs.

Overall, in the 1990s gross domestic product (GDP) per capita grew by 1.6 per cent a year in developing countries. But these slow gains were unevenly distributed. The per capita GDP growth of the poorest countries in the 1990s was slower than in the 1980s.

Lower-middle-income countries also had poorer economic performance in the 1990s than the 1980s. Transitional and developing economies in Europe and Central Asia actually declined in the 1990s. In 1999–2000 GDP growth per capita in low-income countries in this region was 2.2 per cent per year. Similar rates held regionally in Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa. Sub-Saharan African per capita economic performance grew by only 0.6 per cent. While extreme income poverty declined in the 1990s, much of that was due to progress in a few countries in Asia.

The new decade started with even greater uncertainty. Recent global reductions in trade, a spreading economic contraction and new banking and finance crises as in Brazil and Argentina are posing challenges to economic growth.

Economic growth alone may not be enough to ensure progress towards the MDGs. Whatever gains are made need to be directed to reduce poverty.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC WINDOW Social investments help reach the goal of slower population growth. Improving health care, education and opportunities for women is a matter of human rights; it empowers women, and it also results in smaller families overall. Within a generation this downturn in fertility opens a demographic window, a period in which a large group of working-age people is supporting relatively fewer older and younger dependents. The demographic window is a unique opportunity for countries to invest in economic growth. The window opens only once and not for long. Within another generation it closes again, as populations age and dependency increases once more.

Taking advantage of the demographic window has accounted for a third of the annual economic growth of the East Asian "tigers". Mexico, Brazil and some other countries have also taken advantage of their demographic window. Others have been less successful. The poorest countries are a long way from opening the demographic window, but investment now will safeguard the future. Investment will also protect the present. It will save women's lives, and protect their families. It will empower them to take control of their lives.

Evidence also suggests that the economic gains from declining fertility change the distribution of wealth to the benefit of the poor.

The "macro" effects of population on development are discussed in Chapter 3.

Population, Development and the Millennium Development Goals

The international community has committed itself to an ambitious goal: cutting in half the number of people living in absolute poverty by 2015. To meet the eight MDGs (see box, next page), world leaders have adopted a series of specific and detailed targets for life expectancy (a way of measuring health), education, housing, gender equality, openness of trade, and environmental protection.

The new goals recognize that poverty concerns dignity, opportunity and choice as well as income. Escaping poverty is not a purely individual act. It depends on the support of institutions—the family, the state, civil society, the private sector, the local community and cultural organizations—the political, economic and social environment they create, and the support and opportunities they provide.

The most ambitious effort in human history towards human well-being should be an inspiration, but inspiration must be underpinned by some practical understandings.

The first condition for success is respect for national sovereignty: each country will decide its own needs. National culture and history, and decades of experience with international cooperation, will inform and shape action.

Second, the Millennium Development Goals will focus each

developed an agenda for social action against poverty, centred on individual men and women. Key aims were improvements in health and education, both as personal goals and as public goods.

In the area of health, the recent World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank initiative in health and macroeconomics strongly supports this agenda, focusing attention on combating malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, as well as other infectious and environmental diseases.⁵

In the area of population, the 1994 ICPD endorsed WHO's broad positive definition of health as "not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" but "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being";⁶ and agreed that the human right to health includes reproductive health. The Conference also endorsed the goals of universal education and closing the gender gap in education. The international consensus, before and after the ICPD, explicitly recognizes the importance of demographic trends—population growth, location, movement and age structure, fertility and mortality—on all aspects of development.

Increased attention has been directed to places with large populations of refugees or displaced persons. Natural calamities, conflict and social upheaval have left millions of people beyond the reach of functioning institutions or systems of governance. Immigration can be short- or long-term. Providing immediate

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