

THE STATE OF WORLD POPULATION 2001



PhotoLink

Footprints and Milestones: Population and Environmental Change



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*Girls collecting water in Burkina Faso. By 2050, 4.2 billion people will be living in countries that cannot provide enough water per person to meet basic needs.
Mark Edwards, Still Pictures*

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: Overview	1	CHAPTER 4: Women and the Environment	37
Introduction	1	How Environmental Degradation Affects Women	38
The Connections	2	Powerlessness and Its Impact	39
Demographic Challenges and Opportunities	2	Involving Women in Environmental	
Milestones	3	and Health Decisions	40
Major Themes of the Report	4	Forging New Relationships	41
Environmental Trends (Chapter 2)	4		
Development, Poverty, and		CHAPTER 5: Health and the Environment	42
Environmental Impact (Chapter 3)	6	Demographic Change and Health	43
Women and the Environment (Chapter 4)	7	Pollution and Health Threats	43
Health and the Environment (Chapter 5)	7	Heavy Metals	44
Action for Sustainable and		Nuclear Contamination	44
Equitable Development (Chapter 6)	8	Reproductive Health and the Environment	45
Cultural Change, Population and Environment	9	Reproductive Health Service Challenges	45
		Exposure to Persistent Organic Pollutants	45
CHAPTER 2: Environmental Trends	11	HIV/AIDS and the Environment	46
Water and Population	11	Biodiversity Loss and Health	47
Water Availability	12	Effects of Climate Change	48
Water Quality	13		
New Challenges	13	CHAPTER 6: Action for Sustainable and	
Feeding a Future World	14	Equitable Development	49
Problems of Food-Deficit Countries	15	A New Consensus	49
The Value of Genetic Diversity	17	Multilateral Environmental Agreements	49
The Meat Consumption Revolution	17	Initiatives Linking Population	
Moving Towards Food Security	17	and the Environment	50
Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Climate Change	19	Africa	50
Population and Climate Policy	20	Asia	51
Forests, Habitat and Biodiversity	22	Latin America	51
Regional Environmental Trends	23	North America	51
Asia and the Pacific	23	Needed Resources and Technical Assistance	52
Africa	24	Assessing the Costs of Inaction	52
Latin America and the Caribbean	25	Environmental Paybacks from	
Western Asia	25	Population-related Investments	53
		Environmental ‘Externalities’ to Child-bearing	53
CHAPTER 3: Developmental Levels and		Alternative Scenarios	54
Environmental Impact	27	Changes in Age Structure	54
Determining the Impact of Human Activity	27	Recommendations for Action	55
Poverty and the Environment	28		
A Complex Interaction	28	APPENDIX: Global Agreements on Human Rights,	
Globalization and Poverty	29	Environment and Development, Reproductive	
Measuring Poverty’s Dimensions	30	Health and Gender Equality	59
Win-win Solutions for Poverty		Human Rights Treaties	59
and the Environment	30	UN Conference on Environment	
Energy and Poverty	31	and Development	59
Rural Development and Population	31	International Conference on	
Urbanization	32	Population and Development	60
Pollution	33	Fourth World Conference on Women	61
Loss of Farmland	33	World Summit on Social Development	61
Problems of Growth	34	The Millennium Declaration	61
Wasteful Consumption Patterns	34		
Humanity’s ‘Ecological Footprint’	35	NOTES	62
Environmental Refugees	36		

GRAPHS

Fig. 1: Maternal Mortality, by Subregion, 1995 . . .	4
Fig. 2: Water Resources Per Capita, by Subregion, 2000	12
Fig. 3: Percentage of Population Under- nourished, by Subregion, 1996-1998	14
Fig. 4: Cropland Per Capita, by Subregion, 1996-1998	14
Fig. 5: Global CO ₂ Emissions, 1950-1997	18
Fig. 6: Projected CO ₂ Emissions Under Different Population and Technology Assumptions, 1990-2100	18
Fig. 7: Ecological Footprint, by Region, 1996	36
Fig. 8: Proportion of Girls Entering and Completing Primary School, by Subregion	40
Fig. 9: Adults and Children Living with HIV/AIDS, December 2000 . . .	47

TABLES

Table 1: World Megacities 1975, 2000 and (projected) 2015: Population in Millions . .	33
Table 2: Growth in total Consumption Expenditures, 1970 to 1995 in Trillions of U.S. Dollars (1995 Prices)	35
Table 3: Consumption Levels, from Wealthiest to Poorest	35

BOXES

1 Population Growing Fastest Where Needs Are Greatest	3
2 Globalization and the Private Sector	10

3 The Pros and Cons of Fish Farming	16
4 Equity and Environmental Intervention	19
5 Melting Ice Confirms Warming is Under Way	19
6 Kyoto Protocol Faces Uncertain Fate	20
7 Population and International Environmental Agreements	21
8 Protecting 'Biodiversity Hotspots'	22
9 'Eco-tourism': Boon or Boom?	23
10 Living Planet Index	26
11 Rural Migration	29
12 Kenyan District Adapts to Meet Population Challenge	30
13 Rio+10	50
14 Ensuring Availability of Reproductive Health Supplies	52
15 Mortality Decline and Fertility Decisions	54
16 Valuing Ecosystems	56
17 Progress Since the ICPD	57
18 Donors Support Environmental Assessment . .	58

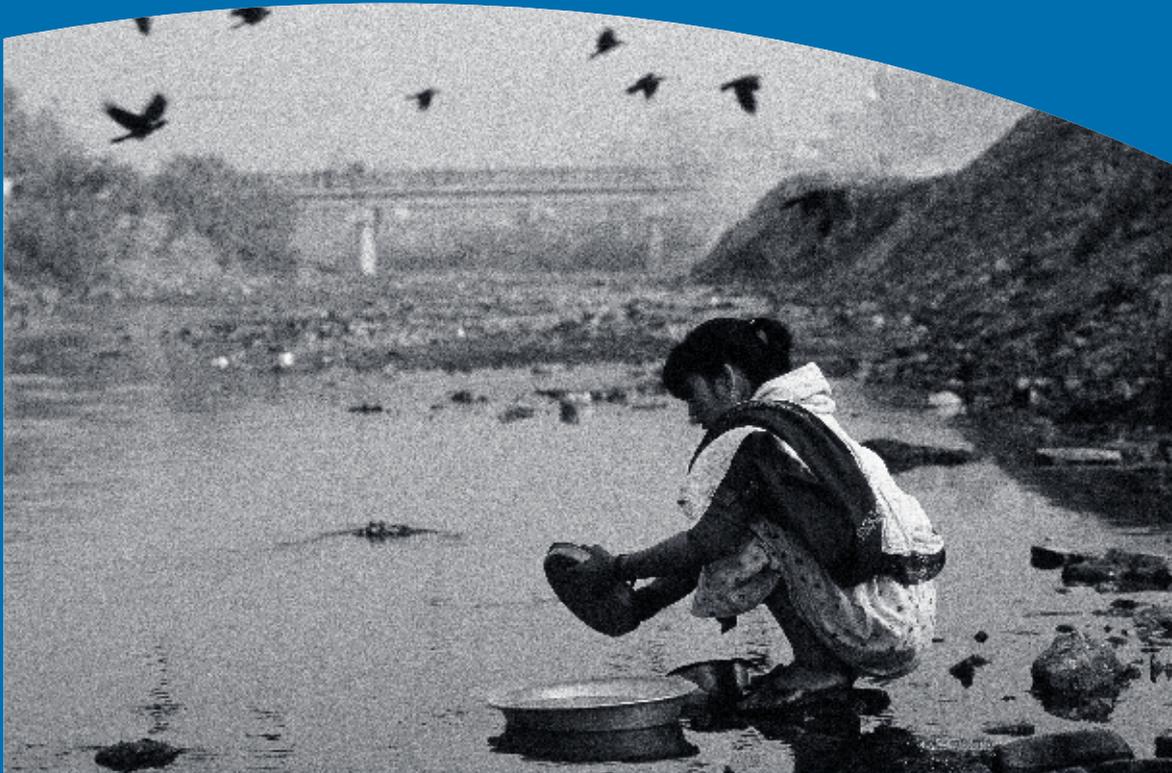
INDICATORS

Monitoring ICPD Goals: Selected Indicators	67
Demographic, Social and Economic Indicators . . .	70
Selected Indicators for Less-Populous Countries/Territories	73
Notes for Indicators	74
Technical Notes	74

EDITORIAL TEAM	76
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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW



Woman washes dishes in river in Nepal. In developing countries, more than 90 per cent of sewage and 70 per cent of industrial wastes are dumped untreated into surface waters.
Hartmut Schwarzbach, Still Pictures

INTRODUCTION

Over three and a half million years ago, two of modern humanity's ancestors left their footprints in the sand near what is now Laetoli in the United Republic of Tanzania. This couple was walking barefoot along a plain. Their people probably numbered in the hundreds or thousands and possessed very rudimentary implements. Only a remarkable chain of coincidences preserved their trail for our current inspection and wonder.

Today the footprints of humanity are impossible to miss. Human activity has affected every part of the planet, no matter how remote, and every ecosystem, from the simplest to the most complex. Our choices and interventions have transformed the natural world, pos-

ing both great possibilities and extreme dangers for the quality and sustainability of our civilizations, and for the intricate balances of nature.

Our numbers have doubled since 1960 to 6.1 billion, with growth mostly in poorer countries. Consumption expenditures have more than doubled since 1970, with increases mostly in richer countries. During this time, we have created wealth on an unimaginable scale, yet half the world still exists on less than \$2 a day. We have learned how to extract resources for our use, but not how to deal with the resulting waste: emissions of carbon dioxide, for example, grew 12 times between 1900 and 2000. In the process we are changing the world's climate.

The great questions for the 21st century are whether the activities of the 20th century have set us on a collision course with the environment, and if so, what can we do about it? Human ingenuity has brought us this far. How can we apply it to the future so as to ensure the well-being of human populations, and still protect the natural world?

The stewardship of the planet and the well-being of its people are a collective responsibility. Everywhere we face critical decisions. Some are about how to protect and promote fundamental values such as the right to health and human dignity. Others reflect trade-offs between available options, or the desire to broaden the range of choice. We need to think carefully but urgently about what the choices

are, and to take every action that will broaden choices and extend the time in which to understand their implications.

Today every part of the natural and human world is linked to every other. Local decisions have a global impact. Global policy, or the lack of it, affects local communities and the conditions in which they live. Humans have always changed and been changed by the natural world; the prospects for human development now depend on our wisdom in managing the relationship.

One of the key factors will be population. It is also one of the areas where action to broaden choices is universally available, affordable and agreed upon.

THE CONNECTIONS

Population and the environment are closely related, but the links between them are complex and varied, and depend on specific circumstances. Generalizations about the negative effects of population growth on the environment are often misleading. Population scientists long ago abandoned such an approach, yet policy in some cases still proceeds as if it were a reality.¹

As human populations increase and globalization proceeds, key policy questions are: how to use available resources of land and water to produce food for all; how to promote economic development and end poverty so that all can afford to eat; and, in doing so how to address the human and environmental consequences of industrialization and concerns like global warming, climate change and the loss of biological diversity.

Environmental devastation is not simply a waste of resources; it is a threat to the complex structures that support human development.

Understanding the ways in which population and environment are linked requires detailed consideration of the way in which factors interrelate, including affluence, consumption, technology and population growth, but also previously ignored or underrated social con-

cerns such as gender roles and relations, political structures, and governance at all levels.

The relationships among environment, population and social development are increasingly better understood. There is broad agreement on means and ends. Women's empowerment, for example, is a development end in itself. Removing the obstacles to women's exercise of economic and political power is also one of the means to end poverty.

Reproductive health is part of an essential package of health care and education. It is a means to the goal of women's empowerment, but it is also a human right and includes the right to choose the size and spacing of the family. Achieving equal status between men and women, guaranteeing the right to reproductive health, and ensuring that individuals and couples can make their own choices about family size will also help to slow population growth rates and reduce the future size of world population.

Among other things, slower population growth in developing countries will contribute measurably towards relieving environmental stress.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Changes in the size, rate of growth and distribution of human populations have a broad impact on the environment and on development prospects. A variety of demographic changes in different areas provide new challenges and opportunities.

Population and fertility trends

Fertility is highest in the poorest countries and among the poorest people in these countries. Failures in health, education and other services, especially for women, contribute to poverty in these countries. Reproductive health services cannot meet even the existing needs of women who want to prevent or delay pregnancy, and demand is expected to increase rapidly in the next 20 years.² Maternal mortality

is high and rates of contraceptive use low (often less than 15 per cent of all couples).

These countries are also among the most severely challenged by soil and water degradation, and the most severely affected by food deficits. In some ecologically rich but fragile zones, known as "biodiversity hotspots", population growth is well above the global average of 1.3 per cent a year.³ Rising demand from more affluent areas adds to the pressures on natural resources in these ecosystems.

The good news is that fertility in developing countries as a whole has dropped to just under three children per woman, about half what it was in 1969, and the expectation is that it will fall further, to 2.17 children per woman by 2045-2050. At the same time, global life expectancy has increased to an average of 66 (up from 46 in 1950), and—outside the areas worst affected by HIV/AIDS—people are healthier throughout the life cycle than at any time in history.⁴

The AIDS pandemic will have severe demographic effects. By 2015, life expectancy in the worst affected countries will be 60, five years lower than it would be in the absence of AIDS.

In some countries, including Mexico and parts of South-east Asia, fertility has fallen very sharply over the past generation, creating the "demographic bonus" of a large generation of 15-24 year-olds ready to enter the workforce, without the pressure of an equally large generation of children behind them. These countries can also expect a rapidly growing generation of older people, but the demographic bonus offers the opportunity for preparation to meet their needs. Countries where fertility is still high and life expectancy is increasing have no such opportunity. Globally, there are over 1 billion young people between 15 and 24.

In industrial countries, fertility is now 1.6 children per woman, below replacement level.⁵ Their populations are rapidly ageing, and in some countries might actually

POPULATION GROWING FASTEST WHERE NEEDS ARE GREATEST

World population will grow by 50 per cent, from 6.1 billion in mid-2001 to 9.3 billion by 2050. The 49 least-developed countries will nearly triple in size, from 668 million to 1.86 billion people, according to the United Nations Population Division's *World Population Prospects: The 2000 Revision*.

These latest estimates and projections by the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs indicate that world population is now growing by 1.3 per cent, or 77 million people per year. Six countries account for half of this growth: India (with 21 per cent of the total increase), China, Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh and Indonesia.

All of the projected growth will take place in today's developing countries, which by 2050 will account for over 85 per cent of world population. Total population in developed countries will remain at around 1.2 billion. But population will decline in 39 low-fertility countries, most sharply in Eastern Europe. Populations in both developed and developing countries will be older in 2050 than today.

Some commentators have selectively emphasized the trends of ageing and declining populations in parts of the world to argue that continued concern about global population growth is unwarranted. The facts suggest otherwise: as many people will be added in the next 50 years as were added in the past 40 years; and the increase will be concentrated in the world's poorest countries, which are already straining to provide basic social services to their people.

The report says that HIV/AIDS will result in 15.5 million more deaths than would otherwise be expected in the 45 most-affected countries in the next five years, a higher figure than previously projected. By 2015, life expectancy in those countries will be 60, five years lower than it would be in the absence of AIDS. Nevertheless, population growth is expected to continue because of continued high fertility. Even in Botswana, where HIV prevalence is 36 per cent, a 37 per cent population increase is projected by 2050.

The Population Division's medium variant projection of the global population in 2050 is 9.3 billion, 413 million more than its last projection in *The 1998 Revision*. This reflects higher projections of future fertility levels in 16 poor countries where fertility remains high (responsible for 59 per cent of the difference) and in several populous countries including India, Nigeria and Bangladesh (32 per cent of the difference).

Source: *United Nations. 2001. World Population Prospects, The 2000 Revision: Highlights. Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.*

shrink unless supplemented by migration. The downward trend in fertility is well established. However, recent studies in the United Kingdom show that family size in some low-income families is smaller than the parents desire.

The vast bulk of consumption is

in the industrial countries, but it is rising fast elsewhere as incomes grow. Measures to conserve energy, curb pollution and promote sustainable use of natural resources are essential for sustainable development in the future.

Parallel measures are needed to

stabilize global population growth. Whether world population in 2050 reaches the high projection of 10.9 billion, the low of 7.9 billion or the medium projection of 9.3 billion will depend on choices and commitments in the coming years. Two actions are central: first, ensuring that the right to education and health, including reproductive health, becomes a reality for all women; and second, bringing an end to the absolute poverty that affects the 1.2 billion people who live on less than \$1 a day. These two aims are closely linked because most of the absolutely poor are female; action towards one will reinforce the other.

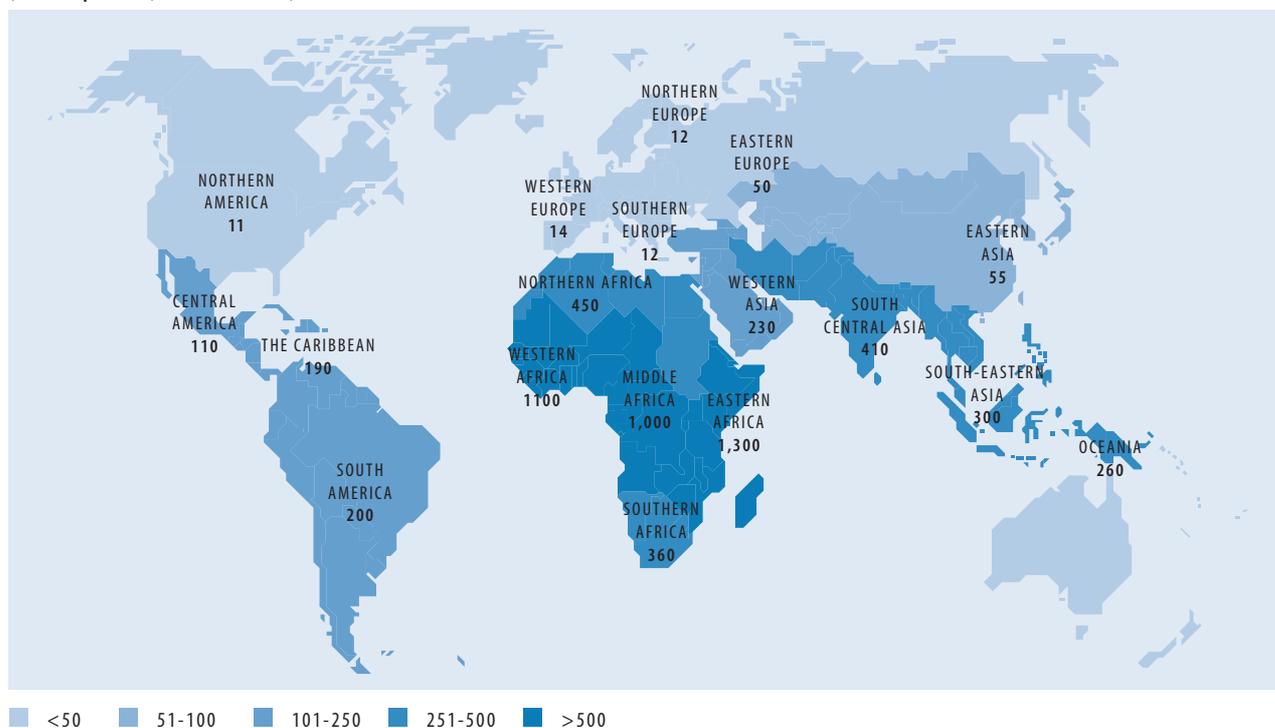
Governments, international donors, civil society and, in many cases, the private sector all have important roles to play in achieving these goals and creating a virtuous circle of smaller, healthier families, healthier and better-educated children with expanded opportunities, and increased progress towards population stabilization and environmental sustainability.

MILESTONES

In the past decade we have learned more about the deepening ecological footprint resulting from the growth of human numbers, changing population distributions and unsustainable consumption and production patterns. The stark challenges to sustainable development have become clearer. At the same time, there are some important signs of positive change, including a growing international consensus on actions to promote development while protecting the environment.

Important milestones in this regard are the agreements of the United Nations conferences of the 1990s. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, was one such milestone. The international community recognized that environmental protection and natural resource management had to be integrated with action to alleviate poverty and underdevelopment.

FIGURE 1: MATERNAL MORTALITY BY SUBREGION, 1995
(deaths per 100,000 live births)



4

Source: WHO/UNICEF/UNFPA

Progress recognizing the importance of population and women's rights and empowerment to the development agenda was marked at the Vienna Conference on Human Rights (1993), the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, 1994) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995). Participatory development strategies featured strongly in the World Summit on Social Development (1995).

The ICPD agreed on an explicit and detailed series of goals, using an approach based on human rights

recommendations for development (including better reproductive health and moves towards gender equality) will help defeat poverty and protect the environment. By promoting slower population growth, it will buy time in which critical decisions can be made.

Each of these major conferences stimulated a wide range of specific actions and policy reviews, including formulation and implementation of national plans and changes in national policies and priorities. Fifth-year reviews of progress in implementing each agreement have

nity to incorporate the social agenda of these milestone events into initiatives to promote sustainable development.

MAJOR THEMES OF THE REPORT

ENVIRONMENTAL TRENDS (CHAPTER 2)

As populations grow and demand increases, the search for water, food, and energy resources and the

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