

## Climate Change:

*“Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising global average sea level”*<sup>1</sup>

Our climate is slowly but surely changing. On all continents and in most oceans, there are observations of changes in natural systems. Observations include, but are not limited to, changes in marine and freshwater biological systems, earlier timing of spring events, reduced ice cover and warmer lakes and rivers. These are all phenomena that represent the impact of a changing climate, but are at the same time only early signs of what might be.

Emissions of greenhouse gas is the most significant, human caused, contributor to climate change. Technology and industrialization has provided us with revolutionary means to create wealth and improve health, but our way of life, based on unsustainable patterns of production and consumption,

has also lead to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions by 70 percent, between 1970 and 1994, with the most dramatic increase occurring during the last decade of this period. If the global greenhouse gas emissions are not reduced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is very likely that the effects of climate change will be more severe, compared to what has already been observed and what is anticipated today. In the long term perspective, it is likely that climate change will go beyond the capacity of human and natural mitigation, if emissions are not reduced.<sup>2</sup>

## Young People at the Frontier:

In this year’s *Youth Supplement to the State of the World Population*, we meet seven young people who have experienced, or live in the midst of, circumstances that are likely to increase in frequency and force, when impacts of climate change arrive broadly. Among these are floods, reduced agriculture production and sanitation problems. While some would say that the events that

the young people profiled in this publication have experienced are clearly early signs of climate change, some would say that it is impossible to draw such conclusions. What is fairly certain however, is that the stories in this publication are examples of what life will bring to millions more young people in the future, if we fail to take action in order to adapt to and mitigate climate change, and reduce carbon emissions.

Poverty is inextricably linked to climate change vulnerability, as well as the capacity to adapt to, and mitigate the impact of emergencies and durable changes of living conditions. Poorer people have less access to water, food, livelihoods, infrastructure, health, housing and services. Hence, a disruption or decrease in access to such commodities, i.e. projected impacts of climate change, will have a proportionally heavier impact on the lives of poorer people. Further, the regions where the impacts of climate change are predicted to be more severe are often inhabited by poorer people.

## INTRODUCTION

Climate change vulnerability also has gender and age aspects: Women account for about two-thirds of the poor people in the world, and about seventy percent of the world's farmers, meaning women will face the lion's share of the challenges in many rural areas.<sup>3</sup> Young people between 10 and 24 years constitute over 1.5 billion people in the world, of which 70 percent live in developing countries. Thus, young people, especially young women, are particularly vulnerable to projected climate change impacts.

The young people of today are standing at the frontier of climate change. Today's actions of governments, the private sector and civil society will determine what lies in store for them, and how well equipped they are for what is to come. A great number of today's youth are growing up in parts of the world where the impacts of climate change will hit hardest; there is an urgent need to address their capacities in taking on the challenges that stand before them. In doing this,

the lives and opportunities for young people must be viewed holistically.

Climate change is coinciding with a current global trend of urbanization. As of 2008, more people in the world live in urban areas than rural, with many of these being young people.<sup>4</sup> This is both a challenge and an opportunity, as urban areas emit high levels of greenhouse gas, but provides possibilities for a more climate friendly organization of waste management and transportation, among other things.<sup>5</sup> Young people in cities are characterized by a similar dualism – they are more educated than their parents, but face greater risks of ending up as slum dwellers, compared to adults.<sup>6</sup> Thus, if young people in cities are to be able to exploit the environmental potential of cities, attention must be given to improvement of their livelihoods.

It has been estimated that in the coming decade, 1.2 billion young people will enter the working-age population. At the same time, over 40 percent of the world's

unemployed are young people.<sup>7</sup> Lack of employment risks leading to a life in poverty, thus more likely to be deprived of opportunities to acquire necessary skills and means to prepare them for climate change effects, and adapt to such effects. Young people's capacity to adapt will be increasingly weakened if their health concerns, including reproductive health concerns, are not adequately addressed. The lack of opportunities and capabilities, combined with the exposure to climate change effects, increases the pressure to migrate and leave their places and countries of origin.

If young people have the ability to take decisions on when and how to form a family, and have the tools to protect themselves from HIV and stay healthy, paired with opportunities for housing, livelihoods and access to commodities such as safe water, they stand a chance of being better prepared in meeting the impacts of climate change. Unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and HIV would be less of a chal-

lenge, and hence less likely to interfere with young people's capacity to adapt to, and mitigate, climate change. Inversely, if we fail to address reproductive health concerns of young people, we risk making the task more difficult.

#### **New technologies, new solutions:**

Because of climate change, the young people of today will need to do things differently than previous generations. Indeed, as generations have shifted over the course of human history, progress, development and the shift in life styles that comes with changes, have always come to pass. The difference lies in that effects of climate change will force the young generation of today to lead a different life than their parents and grandparents, with new set of factors in play, some of them potentially making life exceedingly difficult. The development of new technologies and solutions will not only be triggered by a need to increase wealth and welfare. New inventions and methods will be needed for a

variety of human activities, from farming to transportation, if the young people of today want to be able to continue carrying them out at all.

With projected impacts of climate change, many young people will be forced to migrate, but at the same time, migration as an adaptation strategy to changes has occurred all through human history. While some changes, such as migration, are certain to come about, the manner in which we respond to them will determine the outcome.

In a wide range of initiatives during the past decades, people have sought ways of living that emit less greenhouse gases, are less toxic and function more in harmony with the Earth. Progress has been made on virtually all fronts. The next step must be to make successful inventions available to more people, particularly young people, while making sure that young people are included in the implementation of these inventions, so that they can carry the torch forward, today and tomorrow.

Several of the young people we meet in this publication are involved in such activities, providing examples that young people in all parts of the world have strong ambitions to do their part in adapting to climate change, and mitigating its impact. Young people's commitment to the well-being of the world in which they live is a fact. However, such ambitions must be met by opportunities to increase capacities. Young people should not be limited to being beneficiaries of adaptation and mitigation efforts; we have to give them the opportunity to play an active role in the formation and implementation of responses, if the responses are to be sustainable.