

## SUSTAINABILITY

The core message of the ICPD – that a fundamental commitment to individual dignity and human rights is the basis of a resilient and sustainable future – can define a set of pathways to achieve sustainable development for all.

- When asked to identify the population and sustainable development issues anticipated to receive public policy priority for the next five to ten years, 70 per cent of governments listed “social sustainability, poverty reduction and rights.” This was followed by “environmental sustainability” (52 per cent). Only 25 per cent listed “economic growth” as a priority.

**Global fertility rates declined 23 per cent from 1990 to 2010, yet notable differences in fertility rates are observed across and within countries and regions.**

- Developed countries and some middle income countries are now experiencing below-replacement fertility levels, declining population growth rates, and in some cases, declining population size.
- Total fertility rates remain high at four children per woman or greater in 45 developing countries, mostly in Africa, Asia and Oceania.
- Even as fertility has declined, global population has grown to 7.1 billion, and continues to grow by some 82 million people per year, due in part to the large numbers of women of reproductive age.

**As fertility declines, child dependency ratios decline, resulting in a population with relatively more working age adults (15-59) and fewer non-working age dependents.**

- In developed countries, the proportion of the population of working age increased steadily from 61.8 per cent in 1990 to 62.9 per cent in 2005. Since then, that proportion has been declining, and in 2010 it was at the same level as in 1990.
- In developing countries, the proportion of the population of working age increased considerably from 56.8 per cent in 1990 to 62.4 per cent in 2010, and is also projected to decline to 58.4 per cent in 2050.
- Among the least developed countries, the proportion of the population of working age is expected to rise from 53.8 per cent in 2010 to 59.8 per cent in 2050 and then decline thereafter.

**The current development model has improved living standards and expanded opportunity for many, yet the economic and social gains have been distributed unequally and have come at great cost to the environment.**

- Global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased by a factor of 73 between 1820 and 2008, while world population increased only seven times.
- Average consumption per capita almost tripled between 1960 and 2006.
- Inequality has intensified over the past 20 years: eight per cent of the world population has accumulated 82 per cent of global wealth.
- Increasing consumption is vital to improving well-being for the poor, yet at high income levels the benefits of further consumption result in no discernable impact on well-being.
- Economic progress has taken place at the expense of the environment, including the threat of climate change.
- The impacts of climate change, both acute and long term, pose a threat to the livelihoods and well-being of all societies and individuals, particularly the poor and marginalized.

**The error that is habitually made is to identify larger populations with greater emissions, that is to equate one person with one unit of consumption.**

- Only 2.5 billion people could be minimally considered as having consumption profiles that contribute to emissions. With very few exceptions, countries displaying higher rates and levels of consumption have fertility levels that are already low or below replacement level.
- Higher fertility countries tend to be have high poverty and very low levels of consumption. Poor countries and their populations have the right to development and to improve their living standards, which in today's world requires higher economic growth. Under this scenario, their consumption profiles will and should increase; unless this increase happens in a radically different manner than has been the case for wealthier countries, it will further climate change.
- Fertility declines are associated with higher per capita household income and thus with greater capacity to consume.

**Whether there will be emissions reductions from declining population growth is therefore highly dependent on the nature of consumption and economic growth.**

- Governments can influence the trajectory of consumption while enhancing dignity and social sustainability by investing in universal public services, which ensure that the fruits of development are distributed to all, without discrimination.
- A collective shift should be made towards well-being derived from modes of living and livelihoods that are more equitable and have less impact on the environment, with a focus on innovation and more effective collective action on global challenges.

**Seven paths to sustainability**

**Strengthen Equality, Dignity and Rights**

**Invest in Lifelong Health and Education, Especially for Young People**

**Achieve Universal Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights**

**Ensure Security of Place and Mobility**

**Build Sustainable, Inclusive Cities**

**Change Patterns of Consumption**

**Strengthen Global Leadership and Accountability**