

ICPD Beyond 2014 Issues Brief: Climate Change

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. The risks of ignoring our planet's global environmental limits in pursuit of ever rising production and consumption levels are growing exponentially. Environmental impacts, including climate change, affect the lives of all people, but particularly the poor and marginalized, who have limited resources to adapt, while contributing the least to environmental change. Climate change is a consequence of the intersection of population dynamics and models of economic growth, production and consumption. Understanding this intersection is essential for generating pathways to sustainable development.

Rising Diversity in Population Dynamics

There were an estimated 5.7 billion people in the world at the time of the ICPD in 1994. Global population has now reached 7.1 billion, and continues to grow by some 82 million people per year. Yet over this period, global annual population growth rates have been steadily declining, from 1.52 per cent in 1990-1995 to 1.15 per cent in 2010-2015.

Global and regional population trends mask considerable and growing heterogeneity of demographic trajectories around the world. Developed countries and some middle-income countries are now experiencing below-replacement fertility levels. In contrast, total fertility rates remained high at four children per woman or greater in 45 developing countries, including 18 countries where total fertility was five children per woman or greater.

International migration, while not necessarily increasing in scale, has diversified in an interconnected and interdependent world, and countries around the world are at widely different stages of urbanization. **Future environmental outcomes depend to a great extent on the decisions that are made with respect to location and patterns of urban settlement and growth.**

The Linkages between Population Size/Growth and Climate Emissions

The error that is habitually made when analyzing demographics and climate change is to equate a larger population with greater emissions – that is to equate one person with one unit of consumption. Yet **only 2.5 billion people could**

be minimally considered as having consumption profiles that contribute to emissions. Of this total, less than a billion actually have a significant impact on emissions and a smaller minority is responsible for an overwhelming share of the damage.

While the immediate stabilization of population size would improve the situation in the long term, it would make little difference in our current global ecological predicament. With very few exceptions, countries displaying higher rates and levels of consumption have achieved low fertility levels. Higher fertility countries, however, tend to be mired in poverty and have very low levels of consumption.

Poor countries and their populations have the right to development and to improve their living standards, a feat that in today's world requires higher economic growth. Under this scenario, their consumption profiles will and should increase, and unless this increase happens in a radically different manner than has been the case for wealthier countries, it will further contribute to climate change.

Fertility declines are associated with higher per capita household income and thus with greater capacity to consume. Consequently, **emissions reductions associated with declining population growth are highly dependent on the extent and nature of consumption and economic growth.**

The Disparate Impacts of Climate Change
Climate change, as well as broader environmental degradation, poses a threat to

the livelihoods and well-being of all societies and individuals. Yet the impacts of climate change are likely to be worse for the poor and marginalized, who have contributed little to greenhouse gas emissions and at the same time lack the resources and societal supports to adapt effectively to current and future changes.

As climate change impacts ecosystems and agriculture, many negative effects will disproportionately burden poor women in low-income countries, on whom the extreme physical burdens of food production and water collection tend to fall.

The location, composition and characteristics of the population heavily impact vulnerability to climate change and prospects for adaptation. Integrating population data, particularly small area data aligned with the geography of projected climate hazards, is critical for planning for climate adaptation, and climate-resilient development.

ICPD Beyond 2014 on Addressing Climate Change

Technological progress is critical for reconciling economic growth, consumption, and environmental resources. The increased use of clean technology and innovation, and the promotion and development of sustainable production and consumption patterns through research and technical cooperation between countries and regions is essential for a shift to green economies, including through mutually agreed sharing of all relevant technologies.

A fundamental change to patterns of consumption is required to slow down the frenetic waste of natural resources, to refocus development aspirations on achieving dignity, human rights, and development for all and to enrich prospects for human dignity for future generations. The core contributions to consumption – our modes of transport, our housing options, our utilities – are significantly determined by the organization and the public infrastructure of the societies in which we live. In this light, one of the most established, effective and just means of change that governments can

undertake to introduce efficiencies and ensure that physical, social and economic opportunities are equally accessible and beneficial to all is the generation and maintenance of **universal, cost-efficient, public infrastructures and services.**

The fact that the world is undergoing a dramatic urbanization process, particularly in Africa and Asia where much of the world's population growth will be, is therefore an enormous opportunity for sustainable development, if the right policies are put in place. **Sustainable cities present significant potential advantages in terms of reconciling the economic and demographic realities of the 21st century with the need for sustainability** and strategies to cope with the effects of climate change. Environmentally-oriented proactive urban planning, including improved energy efficiency, especially in the transport and housing sectors, could transform cities into a vital part of the solution to climate change and other environmental challenges.

Individuals, particularly at the high end of the income distribution, also bear responsibility for sustainable consumption. As more and more people recognize the risks of climate change and other human impacts on the environment, **incentives for reducing consumption, together with innovations to generate viable means of consuming less without declines in well-being, will help make changing individual consumption choices a reality.**