TST Issues Brief: POPULATION DYNAMICS[1]

I. Stocktaking

Population trends are characterized by an increasing divergence between countries. Whereas the least developed countries continue to see high population growth, developing countries that are more advanced in their demographic transition are witnessing rapid population aging and even population decline in some cases. Furthermore, many countries continue to see a high rate of urbanization and increasingly complex internal and international migration patterns. These population dynamics influence development at national and sub-national levels, but also at regional and global levels.

Echoing the Rio Declaration (principle 8), the Programme of Action (principle 6) of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in 1994 in Cairo, Egypt, emphasizes two critical elements for sustainable development: the need for sustainable patterns of production and consumption and the need to address population dynamics.

Rio+20, reaffirmed the important linkages between sustainable development and population dynamics.

"We acknowledge that with the world's population projected to exceed 9 billion by 2050 with an estimated two thirds living in cities, we need to increase our efforts to achieve sustainable development and, in particular, the eradication of poverty, hunger and preventable diseases" (The Future We Want, paragraph 21).

"We commit to systematically consider population trends and projections in our national, rural and urban development strategies and policies. Through forward-looking planning, we can seize the opportunities and address the challenges associated with demographic change, including migration" (The Future We Want, paragraph 144).

The United Nations Task Team Report, *Realizing the Future We Want for All,* paragraph 115, states that: *"[Development] Targets should take proper account of population dynamics and different demographic structures across countries and regions and within countries. The clearest expression of these is the changing weights of youth and older persons in societies; different rates of fertility, morbidity and mortality; and urbanization rates. A combination of absolute and relative targets will be needed for an all-inclusive development agenda that takes shifting demographics into account".*

The increasing emphasis on population dynamics is reflected at both the international and national levels. The last review of the United Nations Population Division shows for example that more than 80 per cent of the governments of least developed countries consider their fertility and population growth rates as too high, and 75 per cent desire a major change in the spatial distribution of their population. By contrast, a large majority of developed countries and a growing proportion of developing countries have major concerns about population aging.

Against this background population dynamics became one of eleven major themes that were considered of particular relevance for the consultations on the post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals. This consultation put forward two overarching messages:

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[1] The Technical Support Team (TST) is co-chaired by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme. The following TST members contributed to the preparation of this brief: UNFPA, UNDESA, UN Habitat, IOM, ILO, OHCHR, UN Women, UNAIDS, UNDP, ECLAC, UNEP, ESCAP, UNICEF, WFP and WMO.

1. **Demography matters for sustainable development.** Population dynamics shape the key developmental challenges that the world is confronting in the 21st century, and in return are shaped by macroeconomic, social, and environmental policies; and they must be addressed in the post-2015 development agenda.

2. **Demography is not destiny.** Population dynamics are the result of individual choices and opportunities, and they must be addressed by enlarging, not restricting, individual choices and opportunities. All stakeholders in this discussion made it very clear that we must address and harness population dynamics for development, and that we must do so through human rights-based and gender-responsive policies.

This brief provides an overview of the discussion on the role of population dynamics – changes in the size, age structure and location of populations – in the post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals to date. It highlights principal linkages among human wellbeing, population dynamics and sustainable development, underlines the importance of rights-based and gender-responsive policies in addressing population dynamics, and concludes with concrete recommendations on how to incorporate population issues in the new development agenda.

The linkages among human wellbeing, population dynamics and sustainable development
Meeting the needs of current and future generations requires knowledge of how many people are living on the planet and how many will be added to the planet in the next decades; how old these people are and how the age distribution will change in the future; and where people are living today and where they will likely be living in coming years. The systematic consideration of population dynamics is essential for the formulation of sustainable development strategies, goals, targets, policies and programmes.

The systematic consideration of population data and projections is not only important to improve the provision of goods and services -- ranging from infrastructure to housing, and health and education – but also because population dynamics have far-reaching implications for social, economic and environmental development more generally. Population growth and population aging, as well as migration and urbanization, affect virtually all development objectives. They affect consumption, production, employment, income distribution, poverty and social protection, including pensions; and they raise the stakes in our efforts to ensure universal access to health, education, housing, sanitation, water, food and energy. Furthermore, efforts to reduce poverty and improve living conditions for a large and growing world population will place mounting pressures on the planet's finite resources, challenging environmental sustainability, and contributing to climate change and natural disasters.

The greatest challenge today is to meet the needs of a large and growing population, while ensuring the sustainability of the natural environment. The world population has surpassed the 7 billion mark and it would have grown to over 9 billion before the middle of this century. To feed a world population of 9 billion will pose a significant challenge. It will require not only a large increase in agricultural output and productivity, but also a more sustainable agricultural system. More people will not only need more and more nutritious food, but they will also need many other essential goods and services. The production and provision of all goods and services will require the transformation of natural resources and have a growing impact on water, forests, land and the climate. To address these challenges depends not only on how economic resources are distributed but also on how they are produced. Countries will need to actively promote sustainable patterns of consumption and production, and ensure more inclusive and greener economic growth.

But population dynamics not only pose challenges, they also provide important opportunities for more sustainable development pathways. A fall in fertility levels and slower population growth can enable countries to reap a demographic dividend resulting from demographic transitions and jumpstart economic development. Migration can be an important enabler of social and economic development. Through integrated rural-urban planning and by strengthening urban-rural linkages, rural and urban transformation can be a powerful driver of sustainable development.

II. Overview of proposals

The imperative of human rights-based and gender-responsive policies
Development policies should be formulated and carried out with full respect of fundamental human rights and freedoms.[2]

Whether the world population will indeed grow to about 9.3 billion by the middle of the century and level off at about 10 billion by the end of it – the "medium" variant of the United Nations population projection -- or whether it will grow closer to 10.6 billion by the middle of the century and reach about 16 billion by century's end – the "high" variant of this projection -- depends on policies and behavioural change. Both variants assume a drop in fertility from current levels. The difference between the medium and the high variants is the result of half a child per woman difference in the time trajectory of fertility.

Promoting universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, including voluntary family planning, and access to education, including comprehensive sexuality education, can make a world of difference for people and societies. Together these measures help to avoid unwanted pregnancies, reduce teenage pregnancies, curb gender-based violence and reduce abortions, which often claim lives if undertaken in an unsafe environment; and they also reduce infant, child and maternal mortality and help to combat HIV/ AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, which continue to claim millions of lives every year. Furthermore, they help to reduce the financial burden of disease, which frequently leads to unsustainable household expenditures and debt, and they enable women and men to share and better balance family care and work, which can positively affect their labor force participation and household incomes. These effects at the household level, together with a fall in fertility and a deceleration of population growth at the macro level, make important contributions to poverty reduction, as well as social, economic and environmental sustainability.

Right-based and gender-responsive policies are also critical in a context of low fertility and population ageing. Policies addressing low fertility should promote a better work-life balance, and should ensure access to essential services, such as child care and social protection. Progress in these areas would eliminate important reasons why families are hesitant to have a larger number of children. Furthermore, non-discriminatory policies are important to allow older persons to contribute fully to society while at the same time receiving the care, services and social protection they need. Fiscal policies, social protection and non-financial support systems for families along these lines can influence decisions about family size. Similarly, rural and urban planning,

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[2] Accordingly, the outcome documents of the global consultation on population dynamics emphasize rights-based and gender-responsive policies to address and harness population dynamics, and to this end they reaffirmed the Cairo Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994; the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the United Nations Conference on Women in 1995; the Programme of Action adopted at the HABITAT (1995); the United Nations Millennium Declaration (2000); the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (2002); the Chair's Conclusion on the UN High-level Dialogue on Migration (2006); the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (2012).

infrastructure, building standards, and the classification and management of land, can encourage more sustainable settlement patterns, and the integration of migrants into their host communities. A human rights-based approach is also crucial in migration policies, which should be formulated in full respect and protection of migrant's rights and fundamental freedoms.

Four priority areas for action
To address and harness population dynamics, the global discussion on population dynamics has emphasized action in the following broad areas:

1. **Invest in human capital throughout the life course to realize the dividends of demographic transitions.** Whether countries are able to seize the benefits that are associated with deceleration of population growth, as well as the benefits that can come with an aging population, depends on investment in human capital throughout the life course.

   In a world of 7 billion there are currently about 1.8 billion young men and women in the age-range of 10-24 years. Young people represent hopes and aspirations for the future. This is true in the world's least developed countries, which have a large and growing youth population, as well as more advanced countries, which have an increasingly older population. Whatever the demographic specificities of countries, young people are expected to make productive contributions to societies, get a decent job, pay taxes, and contribute to social protection systems. Yet, there often is a significant gap between expectations of young people and the realities confronted by them. Many do not benefit from adequate investment in health and education, including technical and vocational skills; many are unable to find productive and remunerative employment and decent work; and many therefore continue to depend on public and private support mechanisms even in their most productive ages.

   Investment in young people is not only an economic and social necessity but also a moral obligation and must start from an early age and continue throughout the life course. The formation of human capital depends on investment in education beyond the primary level, but it often starts with access to health information and services, including for sexual and reproductive health. A concerted effort is needed to ensure universal access to education, to sexual and reproductive health, and to decent work opportunities in an integrated and coherent way.

   While the world population will continue to grow for decades to come, the world population will get older at the same time. Population aging is already well advanced in the developed countries, but it is most rapid in the developing countries. The aging of populations is a positive sign, which is attributable to a reduction in fertility and an increase in life expectancy, but it also comes with important social and economic changes that demand policy responses. To seize the benefits that can come with population aging, countries will need to promote the active and healthy aging of the older persons. This calls for investment in continuing education and lifelong learning; productive investment in the real economy and employment creation; and policies that counter discrimination against older persons. Countries must also strengthen the rights, protection and integration of disabled persons in their societies. Furthermore, nationally-defined social protection floors combining basic income support with access to essential health and social services can provide a coherent approach to empower and protect people over the life course.

2. **Seize the developmental benefits of migration**. Migration changes the lives of migrants and has far-reaching implications for communities and countries. More than 214 million people today live outside their countries of origin, and over 760 million are estimated to live in their own countries but outside their regions of origin, making a total of about 1 billion migrants today.

The decision to migrate is attributable to the complex interaction of different factors, but most fundamentally it is prompted by the aspiration to improve living conditions. Migration allows people to escape from dire situations (including poverty, disasters, humanitarian crisis, human-rights abuses, armed conflict or forced evictions), and it enables people to look for more promising lives, livelihoods and lifestyles elsewhere (including access to adequate healthcare and education, decent work opportunities, justice and freedom of expression, and to more attractive economic, social, cultural and political environments). Furthermore, migration creates development impacts at both ends of migration corridors. Migration and the resources it generates in the form of diaspora investments, workers' remittances, and knowledge and skills transfers can enhance individual capabilities and human development at the household level—at both origin and destination—but can also contribute to local and national development and bring resilience to economic and environmental risks and shocks.

However, many migrants move to areas where they are more vulnerable to natural hazards than in their places of origin. Furthermore, many migrants are still forced to leave their homes or are victims of trafficking, and too many are lacking basic human rights and access to essential services. Vulnerable groups of migrants, such as women, children, adolescents and youth, undocumented migrants, domestic workers, and temporary and low-skilled workers often do not have adequate protection. They often lack labor rights and have limited access to justice, health care, housing and education and to other public services.

While it presents many opportunities, migration remains a considerable governance challenge at the local, national, regional and global levels. Today, South-South migration is becoming as important as South-North migration, and many countries are now simultaneously countries of origin, transit and destination. To reap the developmental benefits of migration, countries need to establish comprehensive, balanced and inclusive national policies on migration, and at the same time they will need to strengthen bilateral, regional and global partnerships on migration, based on the principles of non-discrimination, empowerment, participation and accountability. Governments, international organizations, business, trade unions and civil society and the private sector should work together to develop adequate governance structures for migration at different levels, and the workers' and employers' groups should help to identify the gaps and needs in labor markets.

It is essential that countries protect, respect and fulfill the human rights of all migrants, including by assuring the labor rights of migrant workers; reduce the social and economic costs of migration, including by facilitating the transfer of remittances and lowering the costs of such transfers; and take measures to ensure the portability of acquired rights and benefits across borders, including social security schemes.

3. **Create liveable and sustainable cities for growing populations.** A historic milestone was achieved in 2007 when the global proportion of people living in cities and towns reached the 50 per cent mark. By 2050 this proportion is expected to rise to about 67 per cent. The rapidly increasing dominance of cities places the process of urbanization among the most significant global social transformations of the twenty-first century.

Unplanned urban growth increases vulnerability to natural hazards and can exacerbate urban poverty. Despite increasing attention to improving access to basic services in slums, in absolute terms, the number of slum dwellers in the developing world has risen as urban municipalities have failed to keep up with the rapid pace of growth of slum areas. Today, many cities are simultaneously dealing with congestion and sprawl.

However, by anticipating urbanization, leveraging the advantages of agglomeration, and managing urban growth as part of their respective development strategies, central governments and local authorities can address the challenges of urban growth. Cities have always been centers for development, innovation and the arts, and if well managed cities make an important contribution to social, economic and environmental sustainability. Higher population density enables governments to more easily deliver essential infrastructure and services in urban areas at relatively low cost per capita. Furthermore, urbanization can produce energy savings, particularly in the housing and transportation sectors. Addressing the challenge of high population density with deteriorating living conditions, especially in slums, as well as the challenge of urban sprawl, critically depends on infrastructure development, including affordable public transport, and green spaces.

The success in creating liveable and sustainable cities has knock-on effects in terms of providing rural populations with greater access to services such as education and healthcare, while also empowering them economically. To strengthen the linkages between rural and urban areas, through transport networks and other types of infrastructure, is a critical step towards an integrated, balanced and sustainable development of countries.

4. **Collect, analyze and use population data and projections for sustainable development.** People-centered development strategies must systematically consider changes in the number, age, location and living conditions of people; and use population data and projections to inform development goals, targets and indicators, as well as policies and programmes. Sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive statistics are key to developing and monitoring gender-sensitive policies, budgets and programmes. While population dynamics can be influenced through a wide range of policies that are put in place today – for example in the area of health, education, employment and social protection, energy, and housing -- these policies will only be effective if they are themselves informed by data on population trends.

Forward-looking sustainable development goals and targets need to take a dynamic, rather than static, view of population patterns and trends. Without considering how many people will be living on the planet, where and how they will be living, and how old they are, we cannot hope to meet the needs of people. For example, to set meaningful targets with respect to education in fifteen years from now, it is necessary to consider how many people will enter primary, secondary and tertiary school age over this period. Likewise, countries must not only focus on meeting the unmet need for family planning of families today, but must simultaneously plan to meet the needs of all those who enter reproductive age in the coming years. Similarly, targets on employment and social protection, including pensions and health insurance, will be influenced by changes in the labor force and dependency rates over time. In addition to accounting for changes in the size of populations, all targets must account for trends in population mobility –-- into and out of countries and regions, internally and across borders – and the subsequent spatial distribution of people.

The systematic collection, analysis and use of population data and projections are essential for forward-looking development strategies with longer time horizons, as well as evidence-based policy making and good governance. Population data and projections should therefore inform development strategies at all levels (e.g., national, regional, rural, urban and peri-urban), and of all types (e.g., national strategy, climate change mitigation or adaptation, environmental protection, health care, education, infrastructure).

III. Possible suggestions on the way forward

To date, all issue briefs prepared by the Technical Support Team for consideration by the Open Working Group underscore the importance of population dynamics.[3] The challenge of reducing poverty and promoting human wellbeing, while ensuring the sustainability of the natural environment, is inseparably linked to population patterns and trends.

Major changes in population dynamics have implications that go well beyond national borders, and therefore population dynamics are a global responsibility of all countries. The universal nature of population dynamics calls for global partnerships on population issues. Sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda must address and harness population dynamics through rights-based and gender-responsive policies. It can do so by focusing on goals and targets that:

1. Strengthen human capital throughout the life course, with a particular focus on health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights; education, including comprehensive sexuality education; and poverty reduction, including decent work and social protection; as well as a particular emphasis on human rights, non-discrimination, equal opportunities, women's empowerment and youth participation.
2. Develop bilateral, regional and multilateral partnerships on migration, with a focus on ensuring the rights and safety of migrants, combating discrimination against migrants, and a focus on realizing the developmental benefits of migration for sending and receiving countries.
3. Create equitable, liveable and sustainable cities that can accommodate growing populations and increased demands for livelihoods and services, while strengthening the linkages between rural and urban areas, and promoting the sustainable development of the rural communities.
4. Strengthen national capacities to collect, use and analyze population data and projections.

While population dynamics pose challenges in all countries, the least developed countries face particularly significant challenges. They not only have the highest rate of population growth and the most rapid rates of urban population growth; they also witness a rapid increase in migration and are hosting a large number of refugees. At the same, they have limited financial and human resources, as well as weak statistical and institutional capacities, which undermine their ability to plan for and respond to the population dynamics that are unfolding.

The priorities and actions to these ends are summarized in the annex table.

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[3] See TST issue briefs on poverty; employment and decent work; social protection; health; education and culture; sustainable agriculture; food security and nutrition; water and sanitation; desertification, land degradation and drought.

Make people count: **Plan for and address changes in the number, age and location of people**

1. Invest in human capital throughout the life course to realize the dividends of demographic transitions

- Fulfill and protect the right to health care for all, including <u>sexual and reproductive health</u>, providing available, accessible, acceptable, and affordable quality information and services.
- Ensure formal and informal <u>education</u> for people at all ages, including life-skills development and comprehensive sexuality education; primary, secondary and tertiary education; technical and vocational training.
- Promote <u>full employment and decent work</u>, in particular for younger generations that are just entering the labor market, women who often find it difficult to balance care-giving and work, and older persons who may wish to remain engaged in economic activities.
- Ensure adequate <u>social protection</u> for people at all ages, with a focus on increasing coverage and providing adequate levels of health care, pensions and social security.
- Eliminate all forms of <u>discrimination, violence and harmful practices</u>, including female genital mutilation and cutting, and early and forced marriages.

2. Promote the developmental benefits of migration

- Promote and protect the fundamental <u>human rights and freedoms</u> of all migrants, irrespective of migration status.
- Mainstream migration into <u>development planning</u>, and strengthen bilateral, regional and global partnerships on migration to ensure safe, regular and orderly processes of migration and reduce barriers to movement.
- Reduce the <u>social and economic costs</u> of the migration.
- Reduce the <u>transaction fees</u> for migrant remittances, and increase possibilities to invest migrant remittances in countries of origin.
- Respect the <u>equal treatment</u> of migrants in terms of employment, wages, working conditions, social protection, including health care.

3. Create livable and sustainable cities for growing population

- Ensure <u>access</u> to essential amenities and services -- land, public space, housing, water, sanitation, energy, health and education -- with special attention to the urban poor and marginalized neighborhoods.
- Strengthen <u>linkages</u> between rural and urban areas and within cities through infrastructure development including affordable transport networks.
- Minimize cities' <u>environmental impact</u> through limiting urban sprawl and promoting energy efficient/low emissions housing, transport and utilities.

4. Collect, analyze and use population data and projections for development

- Systematically use <u>data, projections and analyses</u> of the size, age, location and movement of people to formulate development goals and plans at the national and sub-national levels and across sectors.
- Systematically use <u>disaggregated data</u>, including by age, sex and location, to identify inequalities and monitor progress towards development objectives.
- Strengthen <u>national and international statistical systems</u> on demographic data, including for the production of projections and capacity building on demographic analysis.
- Significantly increase the <u>collection of demographic data</u> through censuses, surveys, civil registration and administrative records, and promote the use of geo-referenced data.

5. Develop and strengthen partnerships on population issues

- Provide <u>financial and technical assistance</u> to support developing countries, with a focus on least developed countries, in the area of population dynamics.
- Ensure <u>evidence-based policy making</u>, which is informed by population data, projections and analysis.
- Strengthen bilateral, regional and global partnerships to ensure universal access to <u>sexual and reproductive health and rights</u>, including family planning, and comprehensive sexuality education inside and outside of schools.
- Reinforce and establish bilateral, regional and global partnerships on <u>migration</u> to ensure safe, regular and orderly processes of migration and reduce barriers to movement.
- Reinforce and establish bilateral, regional and global partnerships to foster <u>sustainable urban development</u>, including the collaboration among city authorities, and strengthen rural-urban linkages.