

# Sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality are key to the transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies

HLPF 2018

**According to UNDP 2016 “demographic dynamics are slow-moving but determine perceptions of future challenges”.**

UNDP is referring to population growth in developing countries and the fact that we have the biggest generation of adolescent and youth ever. Global population growth is estimated to rise from the current 7,6 billion to 8,5 in 2030 to 9,8 in 2050<sup>1</sup>. If this situation is managed e.g. through the demographic dividend, it can fuel growth and more sustainable development - but if (especially developing) countries do not create opportunities for their young people, they risk facing challenges in terms of social instability, violence and even conflict, and they will solely “*place enormous pressure on local and global natural resources*”<sup>2</sup>, according to UNDP.

**At the same time, 214 million women in developing regions have an unmet need for modern contraceptives and 89 million unplanned pregnancies occur every year, of which 74% are due to unmet needs for modern contraceptives**<sup>3</sup>.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender equality are key determinants in the efforts to ensure sustainable and resilient societies across social, economic and environmental spheres of sustainability. The continuous violation of these rights negatively impacts the achievement of other SDGs.

## **The SDGs up for review at HLPF 2018**

The six SDGs up for review at the HLPF in 2018 all have direct or indirect linkages to issues of population dynamics, SRHR/voluntary family planning and several target targets under the 2030 Agenda.

### **SRHR/voluntary family planning in the 2030 Agenda:**

#### **SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages**

Target 3.7: By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes.

#### **SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**

Target 5.6: Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.

<sup>1</sup> UN DESA “World Population prospects 2017”

<sup>2</sup> UNDP policy and programme brief, “UNDP support to the implementation of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development” 2016

<sup>3</sup> Guttmacher Institute, “Adding it up”, 2017

## **SDG 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all**

From a population dynamics perspective, high and rapid population growth, not only increases demands for water and sanitation, but also accelerates water pollution and poor hygiene and/or sanitation, especially in unplanned communities.

Women and girls are often the ones in a household with the chore of fetching water and the ones who will be most affected by water scarcity. Once demands for water increase to such an extent that water resources dry out - often in combination with the effects of climate change - women and girls have to walk longer distances, which has knock-on effects on their well-being and opportunities. For example, the longer walks leave women and girls more at risk of sexual assault, and water-fetching responsibilities may mean that girls are excluded from attending school.

Target 6.2 calls for UN member states to *achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations by 2030*. Most women and girls have menstrual hygiene needs, which are often neglected (including in the indicators for this target that look only at the proportion of the population using safely managed sanitation services, including a hand-washing facility with soap and water) or even form the basis of discrimination, for instance when women and girls are sent to menstruation huts<sup>4</sup>.

Women and girls are facing a barrier to attend school or work, when they lack access to sanitary towels and/or proper toilet facilities to change their towels during the day. According to UNESCO, one in ten African school-age girls stay home from school during their period<sup>5</sup>, adding up to girls missing 10-20% of their school-time, and a poor influence to their education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5) and for the working women on the economic growth of their country (SDG 8).

## **SDG 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all**

From a population dynamics perspective, high and rapid population growth increases demands for energy. Both the International Energy Agency and the UN Population Division recognized this fact<sup>6</sup>. Because population growth rates in most developing countries are a result of high fertility especially among the poorest, their continued consumption of traditional – and unsustainable – energy such as firewood for cooking and kerosene candles for lighting is expected to increase.

## **SDG 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable**

From a population perspective, estimates indicate that the world is facing the largest wave of urbanization in human history, currently over half of the world's population, reaching a total of app. 5 billion in 2030<sup>7</sup>. This increases demands for governments to provide education, health services, housing, electricity, waste disposal etc. for the entire population.

Rural women and girls have more children than their urban counterparts, because urban dwellers generally marry at older ages, use contraception at higher rates, and have higher levels of

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<sup>4</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/07/10/asia/nepal-menstruation-hut-deaths-outrage/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO 2014: Puberty Education and Menstrual Hygiene Management

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.resilience.org/stories/2009-04-20/peak-people-interrelationship-between-population-growth-and-energy-resources/>

<sup>7</sup> UNFPA website: <https://www.unfpa.org/urbanization>

educational attainment and income<sup>8</sup>. Still, women and girls in urban areas face barriers to access SRH services<sup>9</sup>.

**SDG 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns**

From a population dynamics perspective, high and rapid population growth increases consumption and the production of waste. However, it is important to note that since most of the countries facing high and rapid population growth have young populations (under the age of 15), the consumption is not commensurate with the big populations, since the purchasing power of youth is low.

**SDG 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss**

From a population perspective, high and rapid population growth increases demands for food, and agriculture is found to be the largest driver (73%) of deforestation in developing countries<sup>10</sup>. This has a severe negative impact on the millions of people who rely on the forest resources and on biodiversity loss.

**SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development**

Several partnerships have made important contributions to ensure target 3.7 and 5.6, because they understand that SRHR/voluntary family planning is crucial to achieve social sustainability (SDG 4 on education, SDG 3 on health, SDG 5 on gender equality), economic sustainability (SDG 10 on inequality, SDG 8 on economic growth, SDG 16 on peace and stability) and environmental sustainability (SDG 12 on consumption and production, SDG 13 on climate change, SDG 15 life on land).

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<sup>8</sup> <https://assets.prb.org/pdf15/urban-rural-datasheet.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://assets.prb.org/pdf15/urban-rural-datasheet.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <http://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/7/4/044009/pdf>