



Poverty

Data from 2015 showed that, although extreme poverty had declined significantly over the past two decades, 14 per cent of the population of the developing world was still subsisting on less than \$1.25 per day,¹ defined by the UN as an international indicator of poverty.²

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), set out in 1990, aimed to tackle the most acute problems arising from extreme poverty, with targets including halving within 25 years the proportion of people living in extreme poverty (less than \$1 a day) and hunger. The final MDG report in 2015 shows that this was successful — globally, the number of people living in extreme poverty fell from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015.

However, progress has been uneven and there has generally been much less progress in the very poorest countries — in 2011, nearly 60 per cent of the world's one billion extremely poor people lived in just five countries.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), following on from the MDGs, aim to eliminate extreme poverty for all people everywhere by 2030.³ A further target is to reduce by at least half the proportion of people living in poverty according to national definitions.

The relationship between population growth and poverty is a vicious circle. While lower birth rates contribute to economic development and help individuals and families to escape from poverty,⁴ rapid population growth is an obstacle to economic

progress in some of the poorest countries and deprives those societies of funds for investment to develop. At the same time, poverty fuels overpopulation by depriving women of both the incentive and the means to have fewer children.

There may be limited or no access to contraception due to problems with administration, awareness, distribution, conflict, or affordability. High infant and child mortality rates contribute to women bearing many children, as they will be unsure how many will survive. Households may rely on the labour of their children. In many developing countries, children are the only means parents have of attempting to assure their own security in old age.

High fertility rates affect the health of mothers and families, increasing the risk of maternal, infant and child mortality, all of which combine to entrench poverty. At a societal level, rapid population growth increases the number of people in need of health care, education and livelihoods. This in turn requires more financial, material and natural resources. With the exception of a few oil-rich states, no country has risen from poverty in recent times while still maintaining high levels of fertility.⁵

A further link between poverty, overpopulation and sustainability is that communities which are poor and overpopulated are generally those which suffer most as a result of rapid environmental change and so-called 'natural' disasters,^{6,7} as illustrated by the 2010 flooding of large parts of Pakistan, and by Typhoon Haiyan with its associated storm surge, which caused

widespread destruction in the Philippines in 2013.^{8,9} Being poor makes it impossible to pay for measures to mitigate the effects of climate change, and the more

people there are, the more difficult it is for them to move or to migrate to areas less affected by the changes.

References

Internet references accessed 10/06/2016.

¹ UN The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015 Summary.

http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20Summary%20web_english.pdf

² <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/poverty.shtml>

³ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

⁴ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2781831/>

⁵ J. Bongaarts, Fertility Transitions in Developing Countries: progress or stagnation, *Studies in Family Planning*, 2008, 39 (2): 105-110, Guttmacher Institute. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18678174>

⁶ <https://21stcenturychallenges.org/who-are-most-vulnerable-to-natural-hazards/>

⁷ <https://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/publications/11851>

⁸ <http://www.electricitypolicy.com/News/did-climate-change-make-typhoon-haiyan-much-worse-for-the-philippines>

⁹ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/pressreleases/2014-02-06/poorest-people-left-behind-philippines-typhoon-response>