



state of world population 2017

WORLDS

APART

Reproductive health and rights in an age of inequality



The State of World Population 2017

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MAPS AND DESIGNATIONS

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Delivering a world where
every pregnancy is wanted
every childbirth is safe and
every young person's
potential is fulfilled

WORLDS

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Reproductive health and rights in an age of inequality

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— Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin

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While some privileged households budget for billions ...

... many hundreds of millions barely scrape by on less than \$1.25 a day.

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FOREWORD

In today's world, gaps in wealth have grown shockingly wide. Billions of people linger at the bottom, denied their human rights and prospects for a better life. At the top, resources and privileges accrue at explosive rates, pushing the world ever further from the vision of equality embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Right now, the combined wealth of the world's 2,473 billionaires, as calculated by Wealth-X, exceeds \$7.7 trillion. That's equivalent to the combined gross domestic product of an astonishing four fifths of the world's countries in 2015. It means that while some privileged households budget for billions, many hundreds of millions of families barely scrape by on less than \$1.25 a day.

This is a path that we pursue at our peril. The yawning gap between the richest and the poorest is not only unfair, but a risk to economies, communities and nations. In 2015, in recognition of this risk, the world's governments agreed that the path to sustainable development for the next 15 years must be built on a foundation of equality, inclusiveness and universal enjoyment of rights.

Inequality is often understood in terms of income or wealth—the dividing line between the rich and poor. But, in reality, economic disparities are only one part of the inequality story. Many other social, racial, political and institutional dimensions feed on each other, and together block hope for progress among people on the margins.

Two critical dimensions are gender inequality, and inequalities in realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights; the latter, in particular, still receives inadequate attention. Neither explains the totality of inequality in the world today, but both are essential pieces that demand much more action. Without such action, many women and girls will remain caught in a vicious cycle of poverty, diminished capabilities, unfulfilled human rights and



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unrealized potential—especially in developing countries, where gaps are widest.

The unmet demand for family planning in developing countries, for example, is generally greatest among women in the poorest 20 per cent of households. Without access to contraception, poor women, particularly those who are less educated and live in rural areas, are at heightened risk of unintended pregnancy. This may result in health risks and lifelong economic

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repercussions. The lack of power to decide whether, when or how often to become pregnant can limit education, delay entry into the paid labour force and reduce earnings.

Making information and services more widely available and accessible will lead to better reproductive health outcomes. But this is only part of the solution. Unless we start addressing the structural and multidimensional inequalities within our societies, we will never attain the highest

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