

Population Matters for Sustainable Development



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FOREWORD

In 2011 the world population surpassed the 7 billion mark and it will continue to grow. To improve the wellbeing of a large and growing world population, while ensuring the sustainable use of essential but limited natural resources, is one of the greatest challenges we face today. The link between sustainable development and population dynamics was recognized by the Rio Declaration agreed at the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and elaborated in the Programme of Action, which was put forward at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994. Both political declarations highlighted the importance of promoting human wellbeing in harmony with nature, and to this end emphasized the need for a two-pronged approach, notably sustainable patterns of consumption and production – which is the hallmark of the green economy – and policies that address population dynamics.

This report explains the critical linkages between population dynamics and sustainable development, and outlines a human-rights-based framework to address associated challenges and seize opportunities. The report was prepared in consultation with thirteen international agencies. It also benefited from the deliberations of a global science panel that was brought together by the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) in September 2011 to discuss the linkages between population and sustainable development, as well as a consultation with members of the Global Agenda Councils of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in January 2012 on population and the water–food–energy nexus. The Laxenburg Declaration that resulted from the former, and the statement that was issued at the latter, are reprinted in the annexes to this report.

The broad consultations and in-depth discussions contributed to a report that provides a strong and credible basis for policy dialogues on sustainable development. This report informs the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, which will be held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, but it also bears important lessons for the discussions of the international development goals and the international development agenda post-2015.

The 21st century is a critical period for people and the planet, with demographic and consumption trends posing tremendous challenges in a finite world. These conclusions, along with recommendations for moving towards a prosperous and flourishing future, are at the heart of this report.



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