



## UNFPA VIEWS ON LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES AND SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

**The Sixth Session of the OWG on SDGs will be devoted to the special needs of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing Countries (SIDS) among other groups of countries that share similar development contexts and challenges (Landlocked Developing Countries and Middle Income Countries). This note highlights the particular case of LDCs and SIDS considering the existing gaps and linkages between human rights, women's equality, population dynamics and climate change in these societies. While the challenges and opportunities may differ per group and specific countries, it is clear that the world will not achieve sustainable development as a whole if no adequate progress is observed in all societies and most importantly in LDCs and SIDS.**

### Least Developed Countries (LDCs)<sup>1</sup>

**LDCs are furthest behind in achieving the MDGs and have the weakest financial and human resources to confront these development challenges.** Since 1990, LDCs have made important progress towards the MDGs but not enough to reach them, in particular MDGs 4, 5 and 6. Just to highlight some of the remaining sustainable development gaps: **poverty** affects almost half of the LDCs population; one out of four **children** under 5 is malnourished; only 64% of children starting grade one end primary school; one third of **women** (15-24 years) are illiterate; **adolescent** birth rates are stubbornly high with 115 births per 1,000 adolescents (15-19 years). In spite of progress made, LDCs will not achieve MDG4 and MDG5. **Child mortality** (under 5 years) rate is 95 per 1,000 live births and maternal mortality ratio reaches national averages as high as 430 per 100,000 live births. Similarly, only 46% of births were assisted by **trained health personnel**. Barely 60% of the demand for family planning is satisfied and the contraceptive prevalence rate is 36%.<sup>2</sup>

**The 49 poorest and most vulnerable countries in the world are LDCs.** In 2015, the LDCs' population will reach 940

million representing 13% of the world's population, compared to 17% that represent the "more developed regions". As a result of their relatively high fertility and due to declines in mortality, LDCs will reach 1.81 billion people by 2050 representing 19% of the world's population, compared to 14% that will represent the "more developed regions". LDCs will account for almost 40% of the global population growth during the next forty years. The duplication of the LDCs' population between 2015 and 2050 poses considerable challenges. Human rights based policies, supported by international assistance, must expand human capabilities to alleviate poverty and achieve equality.

**The Post 2015 agenda must emphasize policies to advance gender equality and women's rights and to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.** The aim should be to address the unmet need for contraception through investments in human development, and help women and couples achieve their desired fertility. Addressing the momentum of population growth is also one of the areas of intervention among LDCs, more specifically regarding how to: (a) mitigate the social and economic impacts that young age structures, and

(b) harness the opportunities that young age structures will offer in the future. Women should be enabled to give birth at a later age and thus delaying their first birth until they decide to start a family. In addition, wider spacing between births supports the health and development of women, their children and their families.

### **Small Island Developing Countries (SIDS)<sup>3</sup>**

**SIDS have made less progress than most other groupings, or even regressed, in economic terms, especially in terms of poverty reduction and debt sustainability.**

Sea-level rise and other adverse impacts of climate change continue to pose a significant risk to SIDS and their efforts to achieve sustainable development, and for many represent the gravest of threats to their survival and viability, including for some through the loss of territory. While SIDS have progressed in the areas of gender, health, education and the environment, their overall progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals has been uneven.<sup>4</sup>

**Even though many SIDS are considered middle income countries, gaping inequalities persist in the social sector,** particularly universal access to reproductive health and reducing unmet need for family planning; women's and youth's empowerment; and gender equality. SIDS countries need to harness the opportunities offered by their ongoing demographic transition to unleash economic growth. Promoting youth development, including ensuring access of young people to decent employment is a priority. High-quality comprehensive SRH services and information, including contraceptives and services to prevent HIV and sexually transmitted infections, for young people, and comprehensive sexuality education are also important priorities.

**SIDS have fragile environments that are highly vulnerable to natural disasters, due to extreme weather events and climate change, and to**

**external economic shocks.** While still being dependent on international trade, they are subject to diseconomies of scale and continue to endure expensive communication with infrequent transportation reaching small populations on widely dispersed islands. SIDS are the most vulnerable to environmental risks, such as typhoons and tsunamis, and climate-change induced sea level rising. SIDS also experience a strong (and unsustainable) reliance on, and exploitation of natural resources. Many SIDS suffer from a rapid rate of deforestation and biodiversity loss, as well as from overfishing and depleting ocean resources. The large share of the population of SIDS is directly exposed to these environmental challenges.

**SIDS can avail the opportunity to analyze and harness the inter-linkages between economic development, environment and climate change and social development,** including social protection and basic social services in order to create the conditions to be resilient to emerging environmental risks and adaptation to climate change impacts.

**Planning for sustainable development, both in LDCs and SIDS, will require improving national capacities to collect, analyze and use demographic data and projections,** disaggregated by age, sex, income, place and other key factors, to provide the foundation for effectively analyzing choices and alternatives, and designing policies and programs.

To learn more about UNFPA's position and key asks in the post-2015 development agenda in the areas of health, education, gender equality, adolescents and youth, as well as data and governance, we invite you to review UNFPA's paper **"Empowering People to Ensure a Sustainable Future for All".**

<http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/news/2013/Post%202015%20Position%20Paper.pdf>

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<sup>1</sup> LDCs includes 49 countries: 34 in Africa, 9 in Asia, 5 in Oceania and one in Latin America and the Caribbean (Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Samoa, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu, Yemen and Zambia).

<sup>2</sup> Data pertain to 2010-2012

<sup>3</sup> There are 52 small island developing states (SIDS) spread out over three geographic regions: the Caribbean; the Pacific; and Africa, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Sea (AIMS), of which 38 are UN members and 14 are Non-UN member or Associate Member States.<sup>3</sup> There are 16 UN members of the Caribbean SIDS (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago); 12 UN members of the Pacific SIDS (Fiji, Kiribati, Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu) and 10 UN members of the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Seas (AIMS) SIDS (Bahrain, Cape Verde, Comoros, Guinea-Bissau, Maldives, Mauritius, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Timor Leste).

<sup>3</sup> Of these, 12 are considered LDCs.

<sup>4</sup> The Future We Want. Rio +20 Outcome Document, 2012, paragraph 178.