



Briefing Note

Population dynamics and food security

The background

One of the global challenges of the 21st century is to guarantee food security for a constantly growing population. However, populations are by no means growing at the same pace in different regions of the world. The trend forecast for the period through to the year 2100 is that the population of industrialised countries will grow only minimally. The greatest population growth will take place in today's developing and emerging countries, where 87% of the world's population will live by the end of the century. A high rate of population growth is usually very closely linked to poverty. Poorer people often depend on their children to earn income and to take care of them in their old age; in many cases they have little or no access to sex education or family planning.

Population dynamics and trends are also influenced by processes of migration, ageing and urbanisation, as well as by birth rates and mortality rates. Due to rapidly advancing urbanisation in developing countries, 45% of humankind are already living in cities. Population growth this century will be almost entirely confined to the urban areas of the developing world. By 2050, two thirds of the people in these countries will be living in cities. This process is accompanied by a change in land use. The growth and spread of conurbations results in a loss of agricultural land in surrounding areas, and a rise in demand for water in those cities. The effect is to intensify competition for the use of water, which in many places is a scarce resource.

The ongoing process of rural-urban migration, primarily involving young people, is causing changes to the age structure among rural populations. One of the consequences is a reduction in the labour force, which can have an adverse impact on agricultural productivity. Rural-urban migration can also contribute to a rise in food insecurity in urban households, as city dwellers have to purchase most of their food and are thus especially vulnerable to price fluctuations.

The increase in urbanisation coupled with rising incomes also has impacts on patterns of consumption. The cost of energy needed to prepare food is often considerably higher in cities than in rural areas. Preference is given to meals that are quicker to prepare, such as rice rather than traditional maize porridge or millet gruel. This is often referred to as a 'Westernisation of diets', i.e. a shift in food consumption towards more meat and more foods containing sugar and fat, as well as highly processed foods. A diversification of food and nutrient intake should in principle be viewed in a positive light, yet the new patterns of consumption bring with them the danger of undernourishment and malnutrition.

Food security and population dynamics are closely interconnected. The quantity and quality of food have a direct impact on demographic factors such as life expectancy and mortality, and thus also on long-term population trends. Women who are undernourished or malnourished are at greater risk of dying during pregnancy, and their poor nutritional status has a detrimental impact on the birth weight of their baby and

the newborn's subsequent development. Malnutrition also increases the risk of infection and transmission of HIV, and seriously affects the course of the disease. And last but not least, food insecurity can reinforce existing migration and urbanisation trends or even be one of the causes of migration or refugee movements.

Our position

Rapid population growth, HIV/AIDS, the changing age structure of rural populations, gender inequalities, high urbanisation rates, migration and refugee movements – from the demographic perspective, these are the greatest challenges threatening food security.

In this context, GIZ takes the following positions:

1. Population dynamics is a key factor in sustainable food security

Population trends and dynamics have a particularly important role in relation to food security and agricultural production. They can have both a positive and negative impact on strategies designed to promote rural development and food security. It is essential, therefore, for policies and strategies in this field to take account of population dynamics and the way it interacts with other factors, because it is a key element in achieving lasting success. To do so requires cross-sectoral and interdepartmental approaches.

2. Sustainable food security requires political will

In order for the supply of food to be secured for a growing world population and for the right to food to be made a reality, what is needed is not only a long-term increase in production but also the political will to combat undernourishment, as shown for example by the provision of support for disadvantaged population groups through economic and social policy. Just as important is the task of creating alternative sources of income for the rural population and poor city dwellers so that they are able to have access to food. Another crucial aspect is the quality of food: this must be guaranteed, as must adequate hygiene, sanitation facilities and health care.

3. Reproductive health must be improved

Many women in developing countries have little or no access to sex education and modern contraceptives. This is particularly true for women in rural areas. Programmes on voluntary family planning coupled with education measures and steps to increase women's and girls' political and economic participation in society can play a part in reducing the birth rate.

4. Intergenerational learning is vital

Increasing rates of rural-urban migration have repercussions for rural areas, which development policy and international cooperation will need to address more forcefully in future. One of the consequences is that agriculture will be increasingly reliant on the contributions of an ageing rural population. Appropriate support will need to be provided to respond to this trend. It is important to utilise the knowledge and experience of the older generation and to recognise their role as repositories of knowledge.

Our recommended actions

The interconnections and interactions between population dynamics and food security are complex, so it is important to adopt cross-sectoral measures that contribute to food security over the long term.

GIZ considers the following the most important recommendations for action:

1. Improve education for women and girls

Experience has shown that population growth is most likely to slow down in places where people have access to a functioning health system and education system, and where they have promising economic prospects. This is why it is important to improve access to education for poorer women and girls in rural regions. The same applies to information and services relating to reproductive health. Targeted improvement of maternal health also plays an important role in slowing population growth.



2. Take account of migration in planning

To enable decision-makers to respond appropriately to internal migration and the flow of people from the countryside to the cities, strategies need to be developed that take account of migration in planning processes for rural and urban areas. This may also include making more targeted use of potential opportunities arising from migration, such as remittances and knowledge transfer.

3. Make rural areas economically attractive

Rural areas need to be accorded greater value and rendered attractive once more. This includes, first, greater investment in agriculture, but also job and income creation by boosting support for the local economy, and the agricultural economy in particular. This can help counteract the growing exodus of rural population groups to the cities.

At the same time, agricultural production and productivity must be raised to new levels, on a sustainable and environmentally sound basis. This also means taking account of the challenges posed by climate change. Appropriate instruments for achieving this include agricultural research, the development of innovation, and education and advisory services for small-scale farmers.

4. Strengthen the rights of women

Food production is often left entirely to women. In many developing countries there is evidence of a growing feminisation of agriculture, with women bearing the main burden of food security. Strengthening their rights and safeguarding their access to land, credit and production inputs is therefore crucial for food security at household level.

5. Integrate the fight against HIV with rural development

The interactions between HIV/AIDS and food security are particularly serious for the inhabitants of rural areas. Work to develop a comprehensive anti-HIV strategy for rural regions should therefore be pursued more vigorously.

6. Improve the involvement of older people in development processes

The shift in the age structure of rural areas is unstoppable. In future, therefore, older members of the population should be more closely integrated into policy-making and rural development programmes, and supported accordingly. There are various ways of doing this, for example by supporting social welfare programmes, preventing discrimination against older people, especially older women, and safeguarding their access to productive resources.

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