

billion to 11.9 billion.³⁶ In all projections, regional trends are very uneven. Most of the absolute increases will be in the developing countries, with Africa's growth rate the fastest, followed by Central and South America, Asia, Oceania, North America and Europe. The consequence of this will be a greater percentage of the global population living in developing countries. Yet, while there is no consensus on precise numbers, there is global recognition that demographic factors pose serious environmental challenges and that the planet has a finite population capacity.

The growth rate of population is not the only factor. There is also a need to consider the resources used and the environmental stress on a per capita basis. One person in the developed world will consume many more resources than one in the developing world. Differences in countries' per capita GDP are a crude indicator of relative levels of resource consumption. Other indicators could be per capita energy consumption or daily calorie supply per capita.³⁷ The relationship between per capita consumption of resources and environmental stress is not, however, clear or simple, as the level of technology as well as environmental standards and different environmental assimilative capacities influence the level of environmental stress.

In addition to total population, the distribution of population will influence the environment, as well as generating other potentially serious results. A prominent feature of future population growth will be increased levels of urbanization and the continuing growth of "megacities", with some cities such as Mexico City already exceeding twenty million inhabitants. Growth rates, and the rise in relative percentages of urban dwellers in the developed countries and even more so in developing countries, will place increasing pressure on the economic infrastructure. It has been reported that in Calcutta, Dhaka and Mexico City, more than 25% of the population is essentially homeless.³⁸ Urban population growth could exacerbate urban pollution problems, as well as contributing to social tensions. Addressing the

³⁶Population Reference Bureau, Inc., Population Today, Vol. 22, No.11, November 1994, p. 2.

³⁷For example, for rough illustrative purposes, energy consumption per capita (expressed in kilograms of oil equivalent) varies greatly, with Canada reaching over 10,000 and a number of developing countries, such as Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Togo reaching less than 100. The oil equivalent comprises the annual consumption of commercial primary energy (coal, lignite, petroleum, natural gas and hydro, nuclear and geothermal electricity) in kilograms of oil equivalent per capita. The use of firewood, dried animal excrement and other traditional fuels, although substantial in some developing countries, is not taken into account in these figures because reliable and comprehensive data are not available. World Bank, World Development Report (1992), Table 5, p. 226. For figures on daily calorie supply, see Table 28, p. 272.

³⁸United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Human Development Report 1994, p. 26.