

Chapter 1

Why we need bold action to secure livelihoods

The world has made good progress in improving global livelihoods; witnessing more than two billion people emerge from extreme poverty over the last four decades, real increases in wages for unskilled workers, better life expectancy, greater gender equality and more widespread literacy. However, a number of daunting challenges threaten to undo this progress, particularly on the demographic and environmental fronts. This chapter provides an overview to the entire book. It outlines the status of livelihoods today and enumerates the main emerging trends which will affect livelihoods in the near future. It envisages a range of possible future scenarios for livelihoods, whose positive or negative outcomes depend on how several emerging challenges are dealt with. It concludes with a wealth of ideas for global, national and local action that hold significant promise for securing resilient and inclusive livelihoods for all.

Progress on livelihoods: the end of an era?

Mankind has experienced more than two centuries of almost continuous progress since the Industrial Revolution. The world average life expectancy at birth has increased from below 30 years in the 1880s to almost 70 years in the 2000s (Figure 1.1).¹ In recent decades billions of people have been lifted out of poverty. However, a serious slowdown has occurred with the recent global financial and economic crisis. Other daunting challenges also threaten the future of livelihoods, particularly on the demographic and environmental fronts. How will societies adapt to such challenges? Are there any innovation opportunities – whether technological or social – that can be exploited? More generally, how can we build secure livelihoods? These are the types of questions explored in this book, which builds on discussions during a recent workshop in Bellagio, Italy (Box 1.1). This overview chapter summarises the book’s main findings and key messages.

Box 1.1. Secure Livelihoods: Visions of a Better Future

To address the looming crisis in livelihoods, and at a time when the international community is taking stock of progress to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and discussing the contours of the post-2015 development framework, The Rockefeller Foundation,¹ the OECD Development Centre² and the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), supported by The Rockefeller Foundation, organised a conference on “Securing Livelihoods” in August 2014 at the foundation’s Bellagio Centre (Italy). Thought leaders from various sectors, disciplines and types of organisations confronted, discussed and generated scenarios on the future means people will dispose of to secure their life’s necessities or “livelihoods”.

The discussions at Bellagio were wide-ranging and generated many innovative ideas. The EIU moderated the conference and produced a summary of the discussions: *Secure Livelihoods, Visions of a Better Future* (The Rockefeller Foundation, 2014). The OECD Development Centre went on to provide a baseline of the state of livelihoods in the world, develop trends likely to affect livelihoods in the next 15 to 20 years, explore several possible scenarios for the future, and expand on some of the ideas discussed at Bellagio, as well as to highlight some of the global issues affecting livelihoods.

This publication is the outcome of that work, and draws on inputs from the Bellagio workshop, as well as research from the OECD and other organisations (e.g. the *UNDP Human Development Report 2014: Sustaining Human Progress*).

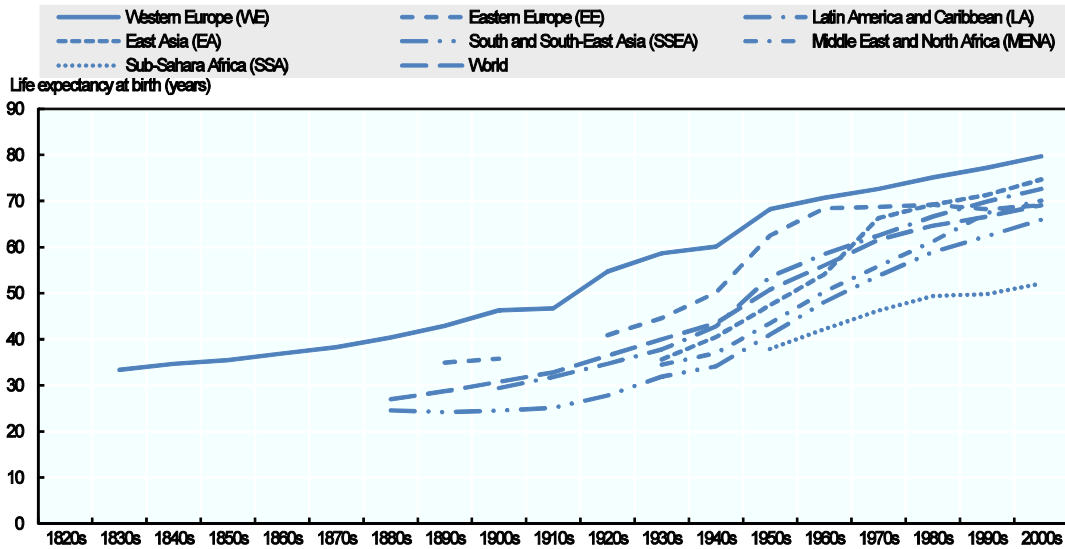
1. The work of The Rockefeller Foundation is deeply rooted in the idea of improving livelihoods, or bolstering the means by which people support themselves, because it believes good livelihoods underpin human progress.
2. The OECD’s Development Centre occupies a unique place within the OECD and in the international community. It is a forum where countries come to share their experience of economic and social development policies. The centre contributes expert analysis to the development policy debate. The objective is to help decision makers find policy solutions to stimulate growth and improve living conditions in developing and emerging economies.

The outlook for livelihoods is fragile

Despite significant recent improvements in well-being, particularly in the areas of income and basic needs, many people remain vulnerable. Without action to build resilient and inclusive global livelihoods, emerging trends in the economy, technology, demography, environment, security and governance could undo much of the progress made to date.

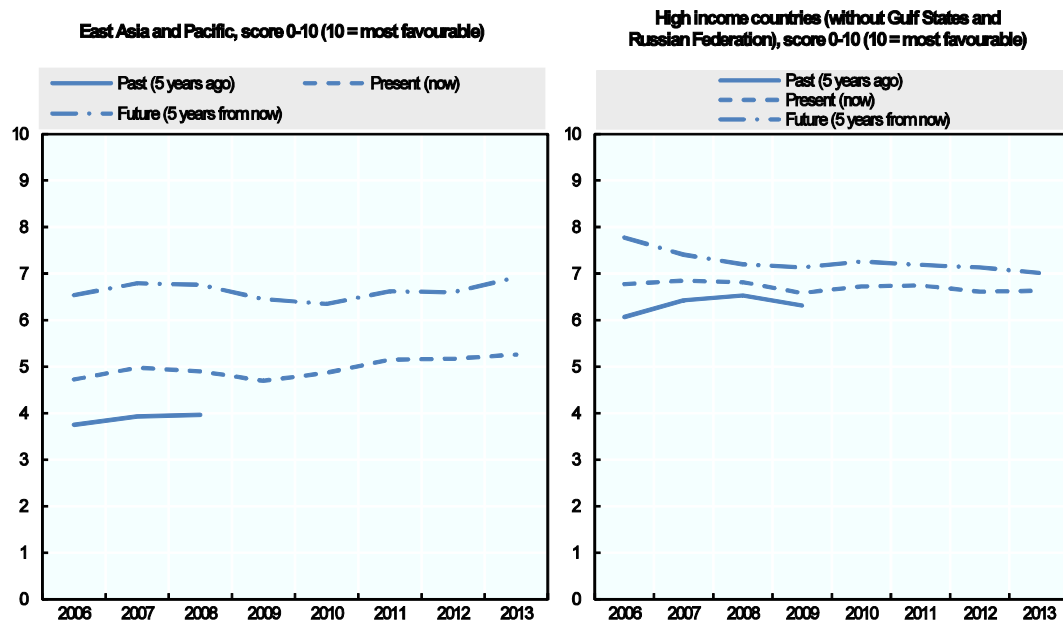
Looking to the future (five years ahead) and compared to their past (five years before) and present situation, people around the world provide interesting insights (Figure 1.2). In all middle and low-income countries, people generally think that the future will be better than the past or the present. The greatest optimism is in the East Asia-Pacific region. People in high-income countries (apart from the Gulf states and the Russian Federation) see their future prospects of life in general only marginally better than the past or present.

Figure 1.1. Life expectancy has increased sharply around the world during the last 200 years
Life expectancy at birth (years, decadal averages): 1820s-2000s



Source: van Zanden, J.L. et al. (eds.) (2014), *How Was Life? Global Well-being since 1820*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264214262-en>.

Figure 1.2. Thriving, struggling or suffering? Regional perceptions of life



Notes: The regions correspond to the 6 developing regions as defined by the World Bank. The category of high income countries does not include the Russian Federation or the Gulf states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE). The index is weighted using the Gallup country weights for each observation and countries' population to calculate regional averages. For more, see Chapter 2, Box 2.2 and Annex 2.A1.

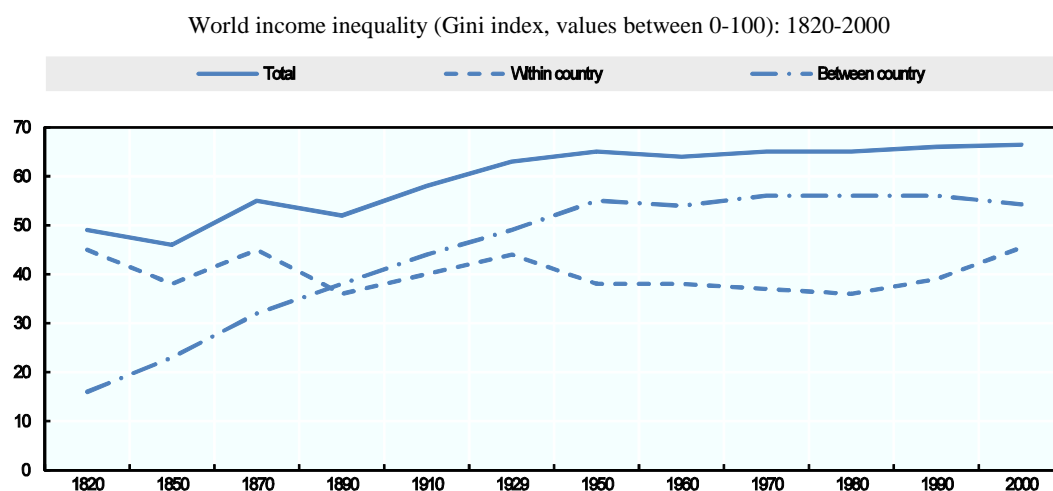
Source: Adapted from Gallup (n.d.), Gallup World Poll, Gallup Analytics, Gallup Inc., Washington DC, www.gallup.com/services/170945/world-poll.aspx (accessed 19 January 2015).

Economic growth is not benefitting everyone

Overall economic growth is accompanied by two worrying global trends: a considerable increase in disparity within most countries during recent decades (Figure 1.3), and a slowdown in job creation.

In 1820, the richest countries were about five times as wealthy as the poorest countries; today, they are more than 50 times better off. Growing income disparity within countries is also becoming a worldwide phenomenon, from the UK and US to the People’s Republic of China and India.

Figure 1.3. Over the last 200 years, global income inequality increased significantly



Note: Income inequality is measured by the Gini coefficient. A Gini coefficient of zero expresses perfect equality, where all values are the same (for example, where everyone has the same income). A Gini coefficient of one (or 100%) expresses maximal inequality among values (for example, where only one person has all the income and all others have none). In the figure, “Total” is the Gini coefficient for world income inequality when the world population is taken as one group to calculate the coefficient. “Within country” is the average of the Gini coefficient for all countries. “Between country” is the Gini coefficient of the average incomes in each country. For details on the country sample and data quality see van Zanden (2014).

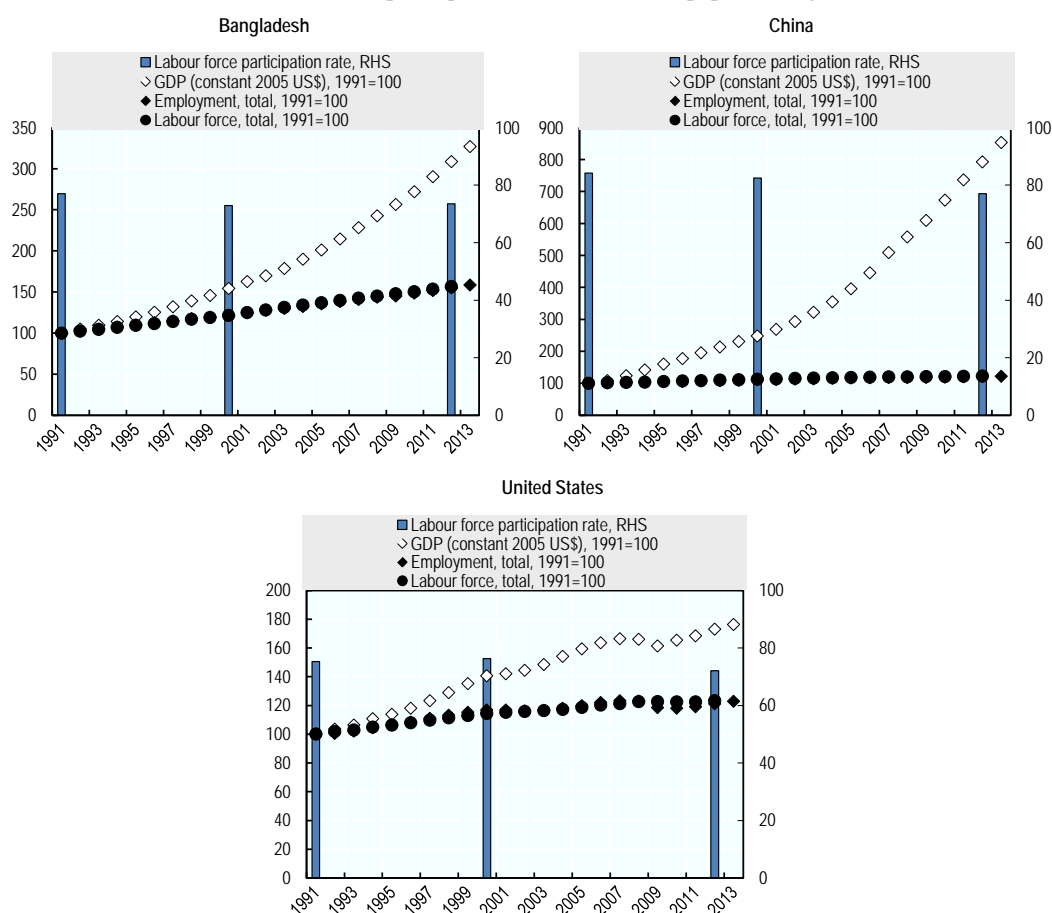
Source: Adapted from van Zanden, J.L. et al. (eds.) (2014), *How Was Life? Global Well-being since 1820*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264214262-en>.

The trend of “jobless growth”

Job creation drives livelihood improvements. The significant reduction of global extreme poverty over the last decades was made possible by the creation of millions of new productive jobs, particularly in the developing world. For example, South Asia created on average 8.5 million new jobs every year between 2009 and 2014. Yet growth in GDP is not being matched by a rise in employment, leading to the phenomenon of “jobless growth” in almost all countries, including the major OECD economies, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, Indonesia, China and South Africa) and certain low-income countries, such as Bangladesh and Ghana (Figure 1.4). This trend has been especially pronounced since the 2000s, reflecting the unemployment problems experienced by a number of countries, as well as significant productivity and technology innovations that release people from repetitive tasks. In addition, working conditions and job security remain precarious for many, especially women.

Figure 1.4. Jobless growth: A new normal around the world?

Indexed GDP (constant 2005 USD), total employment and total labour force, 1991=100 (LHS); labour force participation rate, in % of total population ages 15-64 (RHS)



Notes: The labour force is the actual number of people available for work. The labour force of a country includes both the employed and the unemployed (that is those looking for a job). RHS means right-hand side axis. LHS means left-hand side axis.

Source: World Bank (2014), *World Development Indicators* (database), <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators> and ILO (2014), *Global Employment Trends 2014* (data sets), www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-employment-trends/2014/WCMS_234879/lang--en/index.htm.

The global economy remains vulnerable

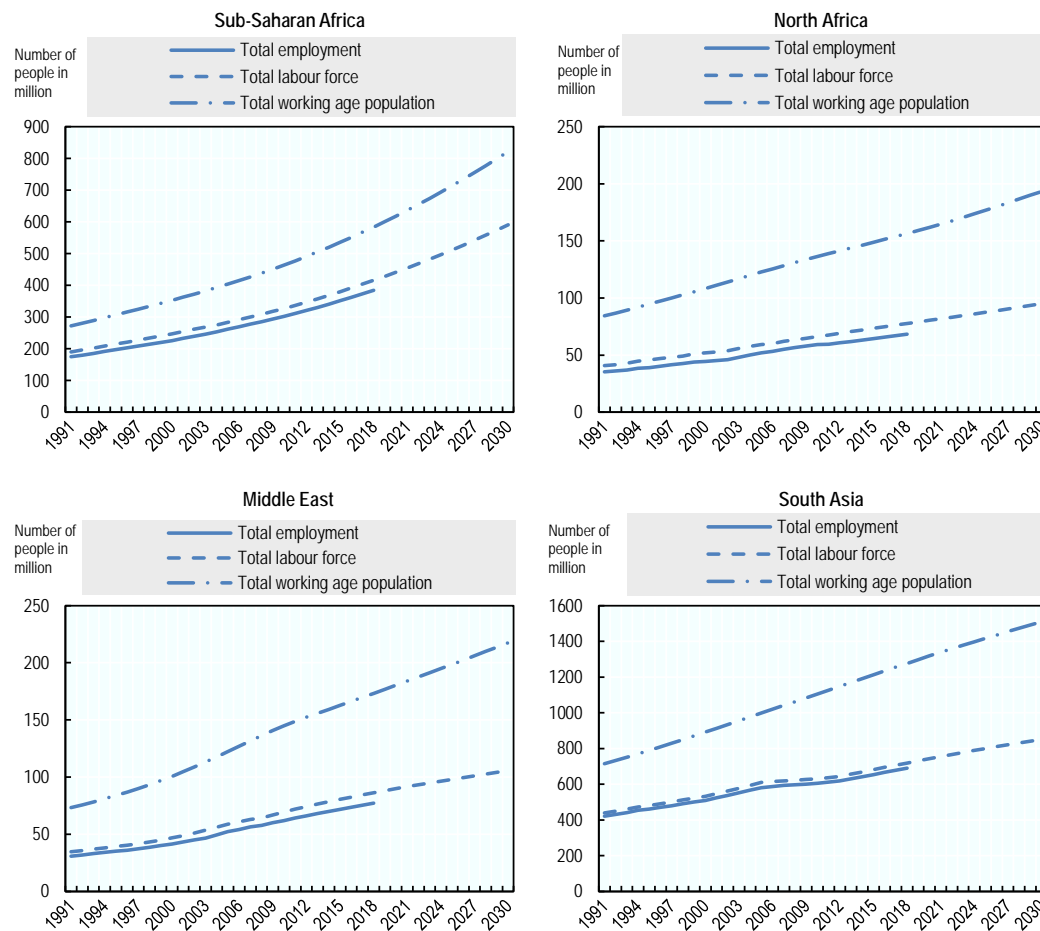
Global growth remains slow and financial fragilities continue. The next major economic shocks may well come from the emerging countries, whose growing corporate sector has benefitted from massive lending by the global financial system and whose growth is likely to slow in the coming decades. For example, the bursting of a financial bubble in China could trigger a global crisis.

Population dynamics are shifting

The world is seeing some massive demographic transitions. Ageing populations in most high and middle-income countries are incurring serious pension and health care costs, while the explosion in young people in most low-income countries will become a source of major stresses if they cannot be provided with enough jobs (Figure 1.5). Sub-Saharan Africa's

labour force is growing by about 8 million people a year; South Asia's by 12 million a year. How will these enormous contingents of young people be absorbed into the economy? What will be the consequences if they are not? Chronic poverty and unemployment among young people tend to lead to social revolts, as the Arab revolutions of 2011 demonstrated.

Figure 1.5. The gap is growing between the number of jobs and the working-age population, 1991-2030



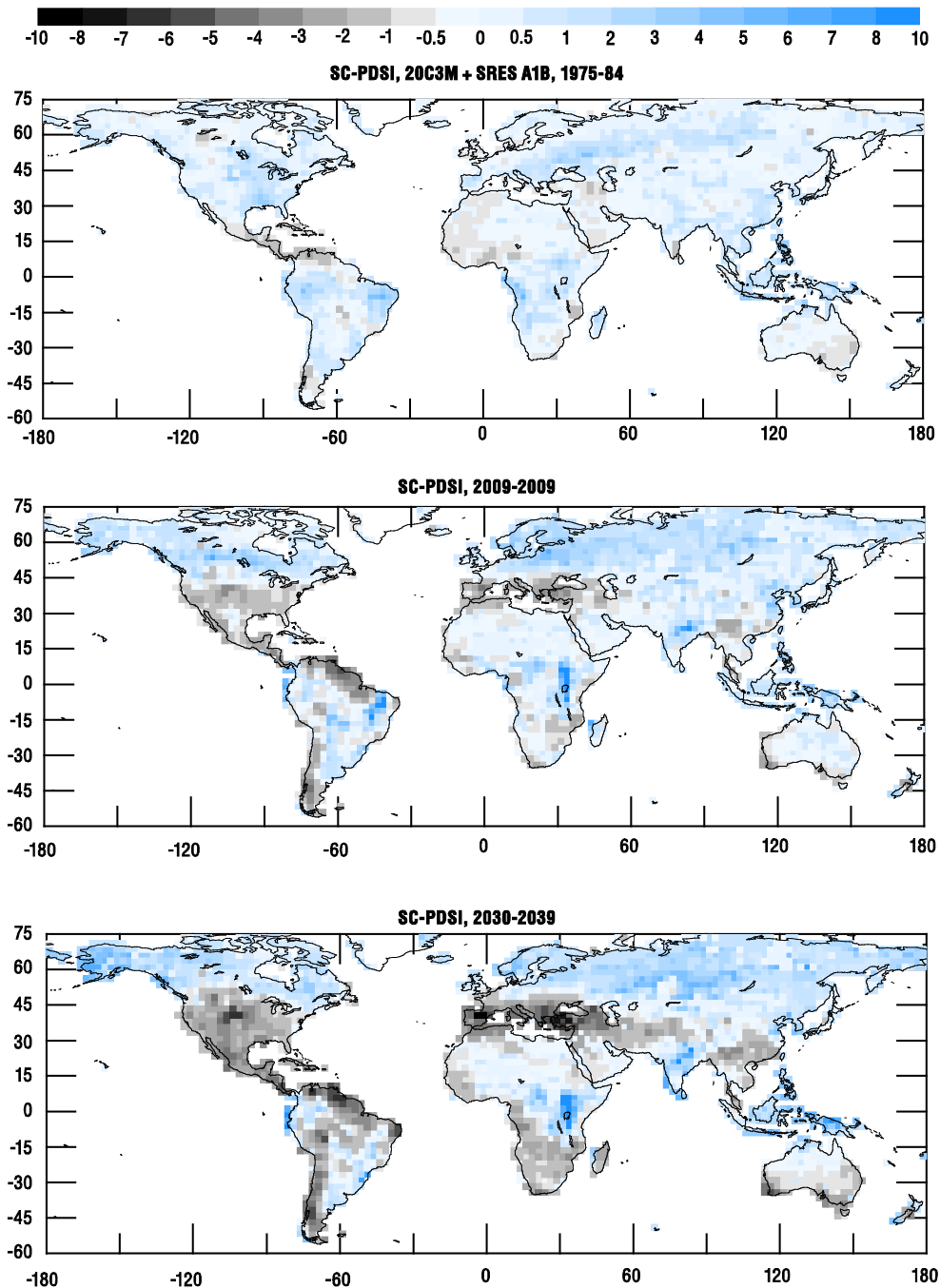
Note: Projections start in 2014. The labour force is the actual number of people available for work. The labour force of a country includes both the employed and the unemployed (that is those looking for a job).

Source: Adapted from ILO (2014), *Global Employment Trends 2014* (data sets), www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-employment-trends/2014/WCMS_234879/lang-en/index.htm.

Environmental degradation will affect us all

There is a clear negative correlation between growth in GDP per capita and the quality of the environment. We are living in a world of environmental co-dependencies in which energy, water, food, climate, and other trends are closely linked (Oxford Martin School, 2013). When we consider these trends combined, the future prospects are alarming. The number of natural disasters and extreme weather events has considerably increased over the last three decades (Figure 1.6) and is expected to increase further. Human-induced climate change and related effects are going to significantly disturb living conditions in most parts of the planet, with an increase in the frequency and severity of droughts, floods and extreme weather events. Left unchecked, the impact on economic growth is predicted to be severe.

Figure 1.6. The increasing incidence of droughts, 1975-2039



Notes: Grey to black areas are extremely dry (severe drought) conditions while blue colours indicate wet areas relative to the 1950–1979 mean. Figures are based on Palmer Drought Severity Index. For technical details on the calculations see Dai (2011). More recent (forthcoming) calculations using a revised method yielded similar drought change patterns but with substantially reduced magnitude.

Source: Dai, A. (2011), “Drought under global warming: A review”, *WIREs Climate Change*, John Wiley & Sons, New Jersey, Vol 2, pp. 45-65, www.cgd.ucar.edu/cas/adai/papers/Dai-drought_WIRES2010.pdf.

One of the most problematic climate change impacts in the coming decades will probably be the multiplication of droughts. Droughts contribute to higher food prices, famine and social unrest, with strong destabilising effects for the countries involved. To feed the world in 2050, food production may need to rise by some 70%. This may require 50% more water – which will be a challenge, given the changes to precipitation incurred through climate change. Furthermore, 40% of arable land is already degraded to some degree, a problem that will be exacerbated by global warming (Oxford Martin School, 2013). Other emerging environmental challenges include air and water pollution and loss of biodiversity.

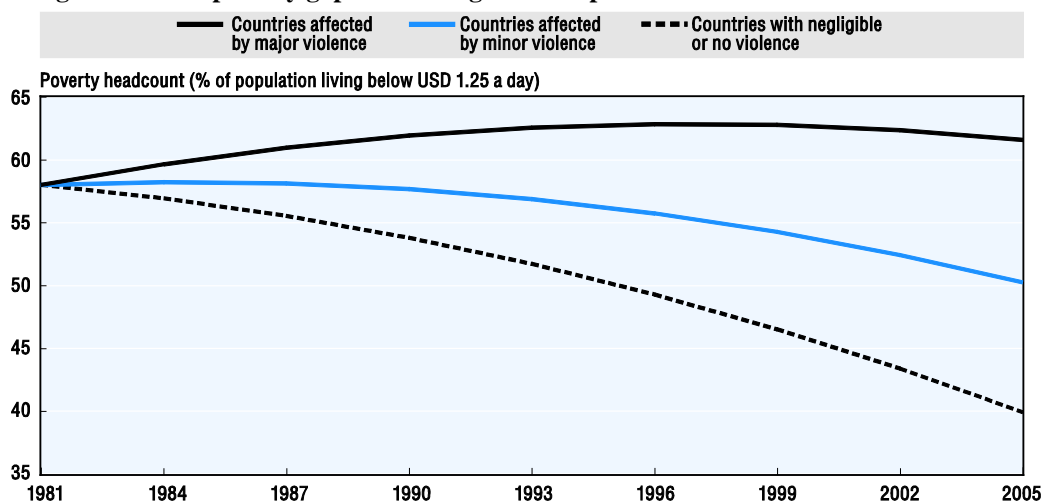
Technology is both threat and opportunity

Technology appears potentially as the main game changer. The IT revolution in its most recent developments, notably social media and the “Internet of things”, provides opportunities for new production and consumption patterns, and collaborative forms of economy that are more socially and environmentally oriented. With the right policies in place, it can be a source of new activities, improvements in living conditions, and solutions to environment issues. However, it can also be a cause of rising unemployment through the automation and computerisation of labour-intensive jobs. It increases the risk of major man-made accidents; the development and use of weapons of massive destruction; and contributes to cybercrime, the possibility of cyber-attacks or even cyber war.

Insecurity and conflict have far-reaching consequences

Poor livelihood conditions threaten insecurity and insecurity undermines livelihoods. Security and peace are essential for livelihoods. Yet, 1.5 billion people across the world (about one-fifth of the world’s population) live in countries affected by conflict. Persistent conflicts in some low-income countries have considerable negative impacts on development, as shown by the strong rise of poverty in such countries (Figure 1.7).

Figure 1.7. The poverty gap is widening between peaceful and conflict-ridden countries



Note: Poverty is defined by people living at less than USD 1.25 per day.

Source: World Bank (2011), *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development*, The World Bank Group, Washington DC, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDRS/Resources/WDR2011_Full_Text.pdf.

Governments are ill-equipped to meet the livelihood challenge

In the face of these challenges and opportunities, governments are unevenly equipped. In a number of high and middle-income countries, trust in governments has fallen to a low level, policies are affected by “short-term” views and vested interests, while many states are heavily in debt. In many low-income countries, persistent governance issues limit capacity for action and change.

Five possible livelihood futures

There are many uncertainties as to how these emerging trends may play out and how they will affect livelihoods. Exploring the possibilities – both good and bad – helps us understand what policies may be needed to protect livelihoods against the worst possible scenarios. Chapter 4 of the book presents five future livelihood scenario landscapes in the horizon 2030 (three crisis and two transformational scenarios) and their implications for policy:

Scenario 1: “Automated North”

Automation proceeds faster than expected and affects ageing societies in particular

Rapid automation in advanced and some emerging economies means that jobs in most sectors are increasingly taken over by robots and artificial intelligence systems. The process is so fast that most people whose jobs are replaced by technology cannot adapt and find it difficult to secure their livelihoods. Automation is fastest in ageing societies. Inequality increases faster than expected. With fewer jobs available to nationals, pressure is growing to increase barriers to immigration in developed countries. Social tensions and disruptions increase. Lower fiscal revenue combined with more people in need of social security support means that government debt becomes unmanageable. In many developing countries, the automation process is much slower, meaning that these countries are no longer competitive, even in low-cost, low-value added sectors.

Scenario 2: “Droughts and joblessness in the South”

Droughts become widespread in large parts of the developing world, challenging livelihoods in regions with large youthful populations

This scenario is particularly relevant for regions with a preponderance of young people (sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, Middle East and South Asia). Securing livelihoods in these regions becomes yet more challenging as climate change leads to more frequent and longer droughts. Subsistence farming becomes almost impossible. Larger scale farming is also seriously challenged. Famines become normal, not only for small-scale farmers but also for poor people in urban areas as food prices sky-rocket. Migration will primarily take place within countries as rural populations flood to the cities. But international migration also increases as many cities reach their absorption capacities. Guaranteeing equal opportunities for all becomes more challenging. The pace of change – in the youth population explosion as well as in the severity of droughts – is very fast. Countries, communities and individuals are unlikely to be able to adapt livelihoods or support mechanisms fast enough. The result is hunger, increasing inequality and social disruption.

Scenario 3: “Global financial crash”

A new, major financial crisis triggers a collapse of the global trading system and a shift to protectionism

A housing bubble bursts in China and some other emerging countries. High levels of corporate debt in the developing world become unsustainable and lead to a large financial crisis and capital outflows. A financial crisis results from the unravelling of the European Union. Commodity prices continue to fall rapidly, creating significant challenges for currency stability in countries relying on commodity exports, such as the Russian Federation, Brazil, many African countries, Australia and Canada. These financial disruptions trigger a major global economic crisis, affecting trade, investment and consumption. Protectionist pressure re-emerges but does not help to avoid social disruptions and governments fail to address problems of increasing inequality. In developed and developing countries alike, many people’s livelihoods come under pressure. Riots are widespread. Poverty rates increase and at least one billion people fall back into extreme poverty.

Scenario 4 “Regenerative economies”

Technological innovations create enough new jobs for most people and economic activity becomes more sustainable

Fast technological advances create many new jobs, new products and services, and allow for the greening of economic activity. Many new fields flourish, including cybersecurity, environmentally resilient engineering, robot-enhanced service jobs, and jobs requiring high skills in nanotechnology and biotechnology. Productivity in the world’s knowledge economies continues to increase at a fast pace. As the real economy becomes a virtual economy, many sectors undergo a transformation. Country borders and distance become less relevant. Markets become more international than ever before. Countries reshape their education systems so that people can perform in the knowledge economy. Technological innovation in agriculture results in migration from rural to urban areas in many developing countries, but planned, medium-sized cities with energy-efficient infrastructure contribute to sustainable urbanisation. While impacts on livelihoods are positive overall, certain people will still need social security but such systems will be more affordable for nation states under this scenario. This scenario could touch all regions of the world, but would come about faster in advanced and emerging countries (and indeed is already occurring in some).

Scenario 5 “Creative societies”

Diverse experiments and initiatives at the local level focus on individual resilience and social well-being.

Technology-induced joblessness increases in developed and developing economies alike. Societies evolve towards new ways of living and working, in which individuals and communities are the key actors of change. State income supplements in rich countries assure a basic minimum income. Developed countries learn from experiments in social inclusiveness and adaptive, frugal innovation in developing and emerging economies. In the absence of secure full-time employment, an individual must put together a portfolio of work – part-time jobs, shared work with colleagues, trading skills and services. This

portfolio lifestyle is made possible by three important factors: (1) technology, which allows people to work anywhere at any time; (2) the adoption of guaranteed minimum incomes in most developed countries, paid for by higher taxes on capital, rather than labour; and (3) new social attitudes in which young people are not so much interested in the consumer culture, but contribute to what might be called “the experience economy.” Cities attempt circular economies and many other green initiatives, especially retrofitting of buildings and water conservation. A robust urban food movement develops, involving many urban community gardens. Public-private livelihood incubators flourish in most cities, providing job counselling, the matching of skills and opportunities, start-up financing, and individually tailored aid packages for young and old. At the national level, much more attention is paid to inclusive growth – growth plus well-being – rather than mere economic growth.

Bold actions for a brighter future

Why are these scenario landscapes useful? Pushing some hypotheses or fictions to extreme, even dramatic, limits helps open up the policy space to new ideas, and more and different possibilities. They serve to illustrate that a range of forward-looking policies are available to policy makers and stakeholders.

The scenarios serve different purposes and suggest different policy responses. All three of the crisis scenarios raise the spectre of greater inequality – in income, education and other public services – and social disruption in both developed and developing countries. The two transformational scenarios, on the other hand, give hope that many economic, social, environmental or technologically driven crises can be avoided through innovative actions which build more resilient and inclusive livelihoods. The book’s final chapter gives a taste of some actions that can help prevent some of the downside scenarios or create more favourable conditions for upside scenarios, drawing on insights from the scenario exercise and from ideas that emerged during the meeting in Bellagio. These actions apply at global, national and local levels:

Global preventive and adaptive action

Global or multi-national action will be needed for many of the preventive policies required to avert crises linked to the financial system, to climate change, to pandemics and many other challenges, and to help ensure inclusiveness and resilience in livelihoods. For example:

- **Act urgently to reach a global agreement for tackling climate change:** The Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in Paris in November 2015, could cement the recent US-China deal to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.
- **Stabilise the global financial system:** by strengthening global and regional framework conditions; avoiding unhealthy financial activities; and increasing co-ordination and mobility of financial resources among the central banks, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and regional development banks.
- **Use tax reforms to achieve shared prosperity:** Possible actions include entering into appropriate multilateral agreements to prevent tax evasion by multinational enterprises and improving the progressiveness of tax systems.

- **Develop an inclusive approach to international trade:** Free global trade could initially have negative consequences for a number of industries and activities. Implementing new trade regimes and agreements in developing countries gradually could allow time for new industries and services to develop and help sustain livelihoods.
- **Manage migration better:** International migration can be a powerful force for better livelihoods as long as it is well co-ordinated. To prepare policies which respond to international migration, an informed discussion of possible trends and their impacts in the future is essential.
- **Strengthen responses to disasters and pandemics:** More funding and capacity building at both international and local levels are needed, and greater use of global public partnerships to tackle issues like immunisation.
- **Strengthen water sharing agreements:** to avert conflict in the developing world in a context of increasing drought.

What if...?

...there was a globally funded research organisation for innovation in technologies for resilient livelihoods: renewable energy, low-input farming, health etc.? See Box 5.3 in Chapter 5

- **Tackle increasing cyber insecurity:** through an international cyber police force.
- **Set up an international research and development agency:** to promote innovation in livelihood-focused technology. Technology is a potential game changer for global livelihoods, especially if focused on global “public goods” such as climate, clean energy, environment, health and the needs of the extremely poor.

Sustaining livelihoods calls for innovative national policies

Control and responsibility for livelihoods are increasingly shifting from governments to communities and individuals themselves, suggesting a new role for government as back-stop and enabler of creative and regenerative societies.

What if...?

...there was a Global Open University for Livelihoods available to everyone? See Box 5.5 in Chapter 5

- **Make education inclusive and livelihood focused:** Secure livelihoods require a myriad of pathways for skill acquisition, and the opportunity for lifelong learning in open-access virtual classrooms. Education should also build basic livelihood skills – to help people meet their basic needs and cope with diverse financial, social or environmental challenges.
- **Promote livelihood portfolios:** As full employment becomes an illusion for an increasing number of people, “livelihood portfolios” made up of part-time work, paid training, and unemployment benefits can help individuals cope with fluid job situations.

- **Establish a guaranteed minimum income for all in developed countries:** by building on and rationalising existing welfare programmes and expenditures and a general reorganisation of tax systems, including the introduction of a negative income tax.
- **Use cash transfer programmes in developing countries:** Cash payments linked to conditions such as school attendance or immunisation can be a powerful force for well-being improvements.
- **Invest in children and young people:** The “youth bulge” in developing countries offers an unprecedented opportunity to enhance human capital to create a large, well-educated and potentially productive labour force. Investments in education and skills at this critical age bring high returns. Bold ideas include a universal self-investment grant for young people.

What if...?

...a new Green Revolution focused on livelihoods to stimulate a more localised, self-sufficient and resilient agriculture? See Box 5.8 in Chapter 5

- **Put green growth at the heart of economies:** Green growth can enhance resilience, reduce emissions, and boost jobs and growth at the same time. This will require policies for greener cities, sustainable farming, renewable energy, the removal of fossil fuel subsidies and funding for low-carbon infrastructure (such as “green bonds”).

Local initiatives are central to resilient societies

While prevention of global shocks is best carried out at the global level, and adaption at the national level, the local level should aim for autonomy from those shocks. Having autonomy (such as a local currency, which can act as a cushion during a global financial crisis) is a central element of resilience. Societies need to evolve towards new ways of living and working in which individuals and communities are the key actors of change. The economy could be driven by local experiments in well-being, supported at the national level, where much more attention is paid to inclusive growth – growth plus well-being – rather than merely economic growth. Initiatives to support greater resilience and more positive outcomes include the following:

- **Support a vibrant shared local economy:** In a world of technology-induced joblessness, individuals can survive through a patchwork of entrepreneurial and social initiatives involving exchanges, barter and virtual service marketplaces. Governments can do much to encourage and scale up such activities through fiscal arrangements, regulation, quality control and assurance.
- **Enable initiatives for micro-finance and local currencies:** Micro-finance, peer-to-peer lending, and social impact investments etc. can combat unemployment and be more efficient and livelihood-enhancing than state unemployment benefits. Local currencies cushion people from the turbulences and crises inherent to the globalised financial system and are particularly adapted to local exchanges between individuals and providers of local products and services.
- **Build green and resilient cities:** Cities are critical drivers of economic growth, being where most jobs are created. With 60% of the world’s population likely to

be living in urban areas by 2030, cities need to become part of the solution, not part of the problem for livelihoods. Green and resilient cities address the issue of economic activity and environmental systems at the same time.

A call for action

This book sees the considerable livelihood challenges which lie ahead as opportunities for innovation, for seeing the future differently and for bold experiments to move beyond surviving to thriving. These innovations or experiments might be technological or social, implying new modes of consumption and production, and new forms of organisations or institutions.

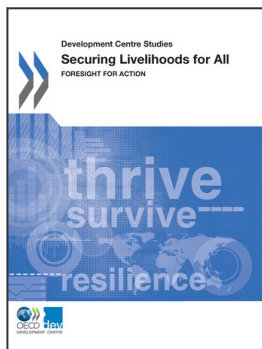
It is up to all relevant players – international, national, local and individual – to seize these opportunities. There is plenty to be done and many places to start. Coalitions of interested stakeholders should come together to start the process. Others will catch up and the momentum will grow.

Note

1. Although there are still significant gaps between regions, and the difference in life expectancy between sub-Saharan Africa and Western Europe has actually increased.

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