People and possibilities in a world of 7 billion

During my lifetime, I have seen world population nearly triple. And 13 years from now, I will see another billion added to our numbers. In my grandchildren’s lifetimes, there could be as many as 10 billion people in our world.

How did we become so many? How large a number can our Earth sustain? These are important questions, but perhaps not the right ones for our times. When we look only at the big number, we risk being overwhelmed and losing sight of new opportunities to make life better for everyone in the future. So instead of asking questions like, “Are we too many?” we should instead be asking, “What can I do to make our world better?” or, “What can we do to transform our growing cities into forces for sustainability?” We should also ask ourselves what each of us can do to empower the elderly so they can play a more active role in their communities. What can we do to unleash the creativity and potential of the largest youth cohort humanity has ever seen? And what can we do to remove barriers to equality between women and men so that everyone has the full power to make their own decisions and realize their full potential?

Our record population size can be viewed in many ways as a success for humanity: People are living longer, healthier lives. But not everyone has benefited from this achievement or the higher quality of life that this implies. Great disparities exist between and within countries. Disparities in rights and opportunities also exist between men and women, girls and boys. Charting a path now to development that promotes equality, rather than exacerbates or reinforces inequalities, is more important than ever. We all have a stake in the future of humanity. Every individual, every government, every business, is more interconnected and interdependent than ever, so what each of us does now will matter to all of us long into the future. Together we can change and improve the world.

We are 7 billion people with 7 billion possibilities.

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