areas where production is almost exclusively linked to agriculture, infrastructure is scarce, and education and basic public health services are lacking. It should be emphasized that the definitions of urban and rural areas vary significantly among countries. Even within a single country there are often significant differences, and not all rural areas are alike. Presenting statistics in such broad categories shows general patterns; however, to assess the disparities in the distribution of women and men and hence to be able to fine-tune regional and local population policies, more specific data would be needed.

3. Fertility

Fertility, understood in terms of childbearing, is dependant of many factual and societal circumstances, such as cultural traditions, education and the overall level of development of the society and community. Two key proximate determinants of fertility are also the age of entry into union and the availability of contraception. The most commonly used measure of fertility is the total fertility rate (TFR) – the number of children that a woman would have over her childbearing years if, at each age, she experienced the age-specific fertility rate. The age-specific rate, in turn, is the number of births to women of a given age group per 1,000 women in that age group.

In the period 1950–2010 the TFR in the world was halved from around 5 children to around 2.5 (figure 1.9). The replacement level is the number of children needed per woman for a population to replace itself. It is generally taken to be a TFR between 2.10 and 2.33 children per woman, depending on the impact of infant and child mortality – the lower the levels of these two phenomena, the lower the value of the replacement level. Populations below the replacement level ultimately confront the danger of extinction; populations with much higher TFR than the replacement level face the challenges of successfully sustaining the growing number of their members.

Although this general trend of women having fewer children is evident in all regions of the world, it has not had the same intensity everywhere. In some regions the TFR declined drastically – for example, in Central America the 1950 TFR was around 6.7 children while 60 years later it is 2.4 children, just above the replacement level (figure 1.10). Similarly, in Eastern Asia the 1950 TFR was around 6 children per woman but the 2010 level is well below the replacement line at 1.7 – a drop of more than 4 children per woman. Northern Africa is another example of this trend, with the 1950 TFR of 6.8 children going down to 2.8 children in 2010 – again a decrease of almost 4 children per woman.

Figure 1.10 provides an overview of the 2010 TFR and the decline compared to 1950. In some cases the decline was relatively small in absolute terms, as is the case in all European regions, but it has to be emphasized that the rates were already quite low at the beginning of this period at between 2.4 and 2.8 children per woman. On the other hand, in some regions of Africa, such as Middle, Eastern and Western Africa, the decline was also relatively