



Because everyone counts

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. UNFPA supports countries in using population data for policies and programmes to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect.

FAMILY PLANNING AND THE ENVIRONMENT

STABILIZING POPULATION WOULD HELP SUSTAIN THE PLANET

ABOUT HALF THE EARTH'S biological production capacity has already been diverted to human use. Life-supporting ecosystems are affected everywhere by the planet's 6.7 billion people, which is projected to reach at least 9.2 billion by 2050.

The links between population and environmental quality are complex and varied. Understanding them requires knowledge of consumption rates that differ between the rich and the poor, of new and old technologies, of resource extraction and restoration, and of the dynamics of population growth and migration.

Humans are depleting natural resources, degrading soil and water, and creating waste at an alarming rate, even as new technology raises crop yields, conserves resources and cleans up pollution.

While rich nations with low population growth are mainly accountable for the unsustainable use of the planet's resources, developing countries, with lower overall consumption, contribute a growing share of total CO2 emissions.

Slowing the rate of population growth may give countries time to take measures to meet people's needs, while protecting the environment through various means.

Preventing unwanted births through family planning, and guaranteeing individuals and couples the right to reproductive health, can help slow population growth rates and moderate environmental impact—and it might be one of the most cost-effective ways of doing so.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

- World population is rising by 78 million people per year, and is projected to grow from 6.7 billion people to 9.2 billion by 2050—over three times the population of 50 years ago. However, **if birth rates remain unchanged, the UN estimates that world population will be 11.9 billion by 2050.**
- The challenge of preserving a sustainable environment is greatest in poor countries that already struggle to meet their

people's needs and that face the greatest population growth.

- **Since the 1960s, fertility in developing countries has been reduced from an average of six births per woman to three, thanks primarily to the use of contraceptives.** However, in 56 developing countries, the poorest women still average six births, compared to 3.2 for the wealthiest.

- The wealthiest countries, with less than 20 per cent of earth's population and the slowest population growth, account for 86 percent of natural resource consumption—much of it wasteful—and produce the majority of the pollution and carbon dioxide.

- At the other extreme, the depletion of natural resources is occurring most rapidly in the poorest countries, where fertility rates are highest.

- The poorest 20 per cent of countries account for only 1.3 per cent of consumption; but their urgent drive for economic growth often leads to lax regulations of polluting industries and pressures to use marginal land for food production.

- Increasing demand for water is directly related to population growth—extra water is needed to grow more food. Lack of access to water is already putting pressure on about a third of the world's population. Climate change is expected to make the problem worse in many places.

- Large and poor families put pressure on the environment. The search for fuel wood, water and other basic needs makes the poor unwitting agents of environmental change. In poor countries, most of these agents are women and children.

- In developing countries, women account for more than half the agricultural labour force. They grow 80 per cent of staple crops in Africa. In South-East Asia 90 per cent of rice growers are women.

- **Unintended pregnancy is the factor in population growth most amenable to programme and policy interventions.** Every year, 190 million women become pregnant, at least a third of them unintentionally.

- More than 200 million women in developing countries who would like to delay or prevent their next pregnancy are not using effective contraceptives.
- Researchers project that the demand for contraceptives will grow by 40 per cent during the next 15 years.

BENEFITS OF ACTION

- Preventing unwanted pregnancies in developing countries through family planning might be one of the most cost-effective ways to preserve the environment.
- In developing countries with high fertility, having fewer, healthier children can reduce the economic burden and environmental demands of poor families.
- Choice about fertility is a step towards equality for women. It empowers them to take part in family and community decisions, and it enhances their opportunities for education.
- Meeting the unmet need for family planning could reduce fertility by 35 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 20 per cent in the Arab states and eastern and southern Africa, and 15 per cent in Asia and western Africa.
- **Family planning programmes have a record of success in reducing unintended pregnancies and slowing population growth.** In Thailand and Iran, for instance, well-managed, fully voluntary programmes have led to significant change.

WHAT MUST BE DONE?

Stabilizing the planet's population is a critical factor in creating a sustainable environment.

Free individual choice on the size of one's family is the most practicable option for slowing population growth.

Providing full access to voluntary reproductive health services, which are relatively inexpensive, would be far less costly in the long run than the environmental consequences of rapid population growth from the failure to meet the urgent need for reproductive health care.

Family planning is now seriously underfunded by donors and developing countries. To meet

the unmet need for contraceptives, global population assistance should now exceed US\$1.2 billion per year for family planning and increase to \$1.6 billion by 2015. Current assistance is \$550 million—less than half of today's needed amount.

UNFPA believes the following will help:

- A broad coalition of support from influential groups at the global, national and local levels.
- Adequate and consistent funding to provide universal access to contraception and pertinent information.
- Mass media campaigns focusing on the benefits of smaller families.
- A wide range of safe and effective contraceptive methods available in health facilities and through social marketing and outreach services.
- National and local debate on the rights of men and women in relation to their bodies, health, education and access to economic and social resources.

WHAT IS UNFPA DOING?

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, works to ensure universal access to reproductive health and the right of all people to be able to decide on the number and timing of their children. Advocacy and provision of family planning are essential to this work.

UNFPA works with governments, civil society and other UN agencies, and leads in forecasting needs, providing and coordinating the distribution of reproductive health commodities, mobilizing support and building each country's logistics capacity.

The Fund works with family planning in 140 countries around the world, providing contraceptives to health posts and hospitals that serve millions of men and women.

LINKS

Family planning: so that every pregnancy is wanted.

<http://www.unfpa.org/rh/planning.htm>