



Population and Sustainability Network

Summary Report of the Network's first Annual Meeting October 13th 2005

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Population Increase: A Universal Threat? What is the role of Europe?

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Sponsor:

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The meeting, held at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, attracted a broad constituency of Network member organisations, those concerned for some time with Population issues and a large number of graduate students from the London School.

Dr Martha Campbell from the School of Public Health, University of California, Berkeley was the first speaker. Her keynote, entitled "Why the Silence on Population?"

Martha described how 'population' has become a taboo subject. It is the most sensitive issue and many young people on many university campuses, including Berkeley and at other universities have been taught that the connection between population growth and the environment is not an acceptable subject for discussion. In many circles it is politically incorrect to say that slowing population growth will make it possible to preserve the environment for future generations.

Martha suggested that investment in making family planning easier to obtain will slow population growth, and she challenged us to end the silence on this topic.

Two workshops, led by the two co-chairs of the Network, **Professor John Guillebaud** and **Toby Aykroyd**, followed.

The meeting concluded with a keynote from **David Nicholson Lord**, talking about per capita consumption. He described how once again, the population factor in discussions about consumption is missing. He reminded us of the $I = PAT$ equation:

$$\text{Impact} = \text{Population} + \text{Affluence} + \text{Technology}$$

He claimed that 'Consumption' has replaced Population – $I = CAT$. The Greens and the environmental NGOs are only concerned with consumption and avoid 'population' completely. There is a belief that there can be a technical fix for everything – including climate change. Having children has become an entirely personal choice: in the past people would only get married when there was a house in the village available for them. Seeing family size in its environmental context is completely ignored – this is serious, given the relatively huge size of the ecological footprint of those living in the rich world.

Catherine Budgett-Meakin, Network Co-ordinator, concluded the event with thanks to the excellent audience and to those who had made the event so successful. We hope that next year some key organisations who had not sent representatives (demonstrating perhaps how taboo the population factor is in discussions on poverty and sustainability), would attend.

Extending the Network and the advocacy of open discussion about 'population' must be a priority.

Catherine Budgett-Meakin
December, 2005