



**Emma Collins** takes a look at the work of the young members section of the Population and Sustainability Network.

## Picking up the pace on population

*"Sometimes it falls on a generation to be great. You can be that generation."  
Nelson Mandela.*

**E**ver wondered how many people our earth can sustain? How many mouths it can realistically feed?

The issue of population growth is largely omitted from media coverage and political discussion as demonstrated by a study of the Millennium Development goals and targets - none of which refer to the problem of rapid increase in the number of world inhabitants. The world welcomes a million new lives every five days and projections of world population predict that the earth will be home to around 9.1 billion people by the year 2050. Most of this growth will take place in developing countries (2.6 billion of the 3 billion increase). To sustain a population of this size at North American standards would require four additional planets!

However, steps are being taken to restore population issues to the political, public and academic agenda. The Population and Sustainability Network (PSN) is just one of several organisations advocating the need to understand the role of population increase in poverty eradication and sustainable development. Sponsored by the Margaret Pyke Memorial Trust, PSN works at an international level bringing together development, environmental and reproductive health NGOs, government departments and academia to increase leverage on population issues. Its members include ActionAid, WWF, Centre for Alternative Technology, DFID, UNFPA and Best Foot Forward.

By providing a space for different constituencies to learn from each other, PSN hopes to address the barriers that inhibit discussion and action, and increase participatory exchange between stakeholders to tackle population concerns facing the rich minority and poor majority world.

The over-arching concept of PSN is the 'population coin'. On one side, the social, economic and environmental effects of unsustainable population growth; on the other, over-consumption and its consequences on sustainability.

- Highlight the negative impact of unsustainable population growth on economic development, poverty alleviation and the environment.
- Ensure better opportunity for health care and education.
- Campaign for adequate reproductive health facilities.
- Promote better understanding of unsustainable consumption.



Despite the taboo on population issues, recent evidence indicates at last a growing sense of urgency. This summer the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health will hold Parliamentary Hearings following a proposal by PSN. In addition, PSN, in partnership with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, will host a series of forums to coincide with the hearings addressing the impact population growth on the Millennium Development goals (MDG). The series will focus on each MDG target, looking at wider population implications and will culminate with a high profile event including a number of key speakers to summarise the findings of the hearings and formulate challenges and future action points for policy-makers.

*"Population issues require sustained critical attention and informed policy making at national, regional and global levels."  
Joseph Chamie,  
former UN Population division director.*

*"Confronting consumption, seeking to influence consumer behaviour and understanding the process of lifestyle change are increasingly important topics for sustainable development."  
UK Sustainable Development Commission Report, 2003.*

*"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."  
Brundtland Commission, 1987.*

*"India is growing by a net million every 19.5 days!"  
Martha Campbell, University of California.*

### Involving young people

Sustainable Steps is the newly formed initiative of PSN, consisting of youthful enthusiasts concerned with issues of population and sustainable consumption. The group aims are:

- to consider the views of current and future generations;
- to develop a global mind-frame for educating young people about sustainable consumption and making healthy, practical and influential choices in our everyday lives.

Working under the mentorship of PSN, the group aims to target individuals and communities to consider the extent of their ecological footprints, to develop educational resources, and actively carry out outreach and promotional events to raise awareness of population issues, consumption and sustainable living.

As an international network, PSN welcomes contributions and ideas from anyone interested in the issues it seeks to promote and explore. Please visit the website and sign the guestbook

[www.populationandsustainability.org](http://www.populationandsustainability.org)

*What size are you?  
Think of the footprint you leave behind.*

*Sustainable living is not necessarily about giving things up, but making empowering changes to your lifestyle for a fresher, cleaner world for future generations.*

*Think big and start small by making the following simple adjustments:*

- Buy local produce.
- Eat seasonal and local food.
- Buy a cloth bag and reuse plastic bags.
- Turn off un-needed lights and standby modes.
- Remember always the four Rs of the environment:  
**Reduce/Refuse/Re-use/Repair**

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or have a look at:

[www.icsc.org.uk/MembersOnly/youngmembers.html](http://www.icsc.org.uk/MembersOnly/youngmembers.html)