



# Population and Sustainability Network

Commission for Sustainable Development 12  
At the United Nations, New York, April 2004

The Population and Sustainability Network was launched as a UN Partnership at CSD 12. An event was held on April 27<sup>th</sup> 2004 with the title of Population, Environment and Sustainable Development: ICPD at 10.

Below is an article commissioned by the Network Co-ordinator from two people who attended the event.

## Out of the Shadows: Population and Sustainability

To meet the MDG of halving the number of people without access to safe water, countries will not only have to meet the needs of half of the 1.1 billion who do not have access today, but also the needs of the 1 billion additional people who will be added to the global population by 2015.

The Population and Sustainability Network Partnership Presentation highlighted the interface between population growth, environmental degradation and sustainable development.

While the speakers approached the issue from different aspects, several themes were consistent through out including the need for reproductive health services, good governance and an increased focus on unsustainable consumption.

The first speaker, **Francois Farah of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)**, stressed that population is growing fastest in many of the poorest countries stressing already strained resources – whether they be natural resources such as water and land, or human resources such as education and health care systems.

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To slow population growth rates, policy and practices must include good governance and management of resources, as well as increased awareness and advocacy as to the relationship between population growth and natural resources. Finally he stressed the role of consumption in providing a sustainable future for all.

While everyone has the right to reach a high quality of life, we need to find a way to meet that right through consumption patterns which will sustain all people and the planet.

**Daisy Owomugasho, from Uganda, of the African Women's Economic and Political Network**, brought to the discussion the themes for the CSD and reproductive rights. In a passionate presentation, she connected these issues of water and sanitation to reproductive health.

After presenting stark facts and figures around deaths of children under 5, women dying in the birthing process and impacts of HIV/AIDS in Africa, she stated that the average life expectancy has dropped 10 years making 43 the average lifespan. "Living to 50 is a dream." Despite this, the population of Uganda is growing by 3.4% annually and poverty has risen in Uganda from 35% to 39% over three years.

She finished her presentation by asking, "Is this sustainable?"

**Marta Benavides of the International Institute for Co-Operation between Peoples in El Salvador** spoke next, stating that Latin America has the highest rate percentage of pregnant teenagers in the world.

Benavides stressed the importance of good governance, communication and education at all levels. Good governance is not only through advocacy at the national and international level but starts at the community level by providing education and reproductive health services to allow women and families to choose the number and spacing of their children, allowing them in turn to educate their families and become involved in community and national policy.

**Toby Aykroyd, from the Network's Steering Committee**, started by saying that every hour 8,400 more people are added to world population and this, alongside climate change, is the largest global issue facing conservation.

However, population must also be considered within an economic framework. Unsustainable population growth increases the burden on basic infrastructure and social services, diverts scarce resources away from capital investment and hinders poverty alleviation.

Aykroyd proposed to the group the fast tracking of a project to assess the impact of population increase on the three pillars of sustainable development; take the results and use to inform policy to all sectors. At the same time, develop and publish the counter point to the work being done to increase fertility rates in global north.

All speakers returned to the fact that the discussion must not only be about the amount of people consuming resources but also about the amount of resources each person consumes. Benavides proposed restating the familiar "live simply so that others can simply live" to "Everyone has to live simply so that everyone can live fulfilling lives."

The links between population growth, over consumption and sustainable development were on the agenda at Rio in 1992 and at the 1994, the International Conference of Population and Development in Cairo. Ten years later neither the Commission on Population and Development nor the Commission of Sustainable Development has discussed these links. Is it possible to reach the MDGs without discussing these connections?

The event was chaired by Catherine Budgett-Meakin, Population and Sustainability Co-ordinator. For more information contact her at [cbm@populationandsustainability.org](mailto:cbm@populationandsustainability.org) or visit the website: [www.populationandsustainability.org](http://www.populationandsustainability.org)

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