

Sustainable development, population & family planning

Population dynamics underpin sustainable development

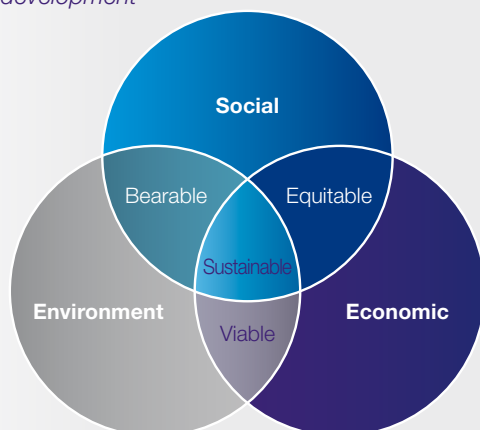
Sustainable development rests on the strength and stability of environmental systems, economic systems and social systems – the three ‘pillars’ of development (see *Box 1*).

While much has been debated in recent years about environmental and economic systems (e.g., climate change and poverty reduction), the social pillar has received less attention. This includes population dynamics, which have a fundamental influence on all three pillars of development.

Population dynamics, particularly fertility, affect the availability of natural resources, biodiversity, climate change, household poverty and many other development priorities.

International agreements and consensus documents over the past 40 years have recognized the cross-cutting nature of population issues and fertility. For example, the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm and the 1992 Rio Declaration include strong statements about the need to address population dynamics in development initiatives (see *Box 2*).

Box 1. The confluence of the three pillars of sustainable development



Population growth is strongly influenced by fertility

Today's population of 7 billion people is growing and will continue to grow – how much and how quickly depends to a large degree on reductions in fertility. The most recent data suggest that the population will reach 9 billion by 2050, and 10 billion by 2100.

These projections assume that fertility will go down in the least developed countries, which is contingent on an expansion of access to family planning in those countries. Without further reductions in fertility, the global population projection for the year 2100 would increase six-fold.

What is family planning?

Family planning refers to supplies and services which enable individuals and couples to attain and plan for their desired number of children, and the spacing and timing of births. Supplies include modern contraceptive methods, such as oral pills, injectables, IUDs, hormone-releasing implants, vaginal barrier methods, and male and female condoms. Services include health care, counselling and information and education related to sexual and reproductive health.

Box 2. International agreements recognizing the link between population and sustainable development

1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm

Principle 5: “The natural growth of population continuously presents problems for the preservation of the environment, and adequate policies and measures should be adopted, as appropriate, to face these problems. Of all things in the world, people are the most precious.”

1987 The Brundtland Report, “Our Common Future”

Chapter 2, (10): “...We recognize that poverty, environmental degradation, and population growth are inextricably related and that none of these fundamental problems can be successfully addressed in isolation. We will succeed or fail together.”

1992 UN Earth Summit, Rio (Rio Declaration)

Principle 8: “To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies.”

1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), Cairo

Chapter III (A) 3.5: “At the international, regional, national and local levels, population issues should be integrated into the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies and programmes relating to sustainable development.”

Voluntary family planning reduces unintended fertility

Approximately 40% of all pregnancies worldwide are unintended; and studies suggest that more than 222 million women in developing countries want to avoid pregnancy but are not using modern contraception. In other words, they have an unmet need for modern contraception. Countries with high unmet need for contraception also tend to have high fertility rates.

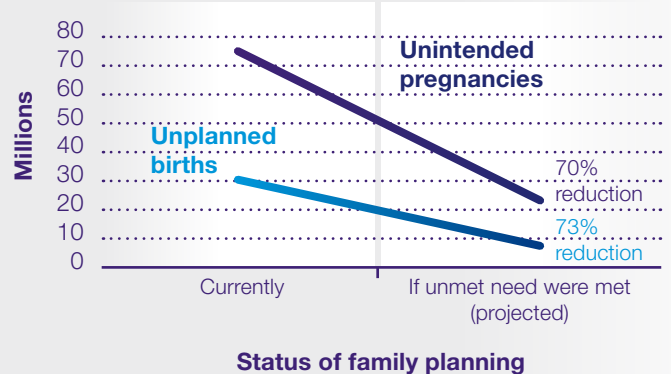
The most effective strategy for addressing unmet need is through voluntary, rights-based family planning programmes (Box 3). These programmes enable women, men and young people to plan the number, timing and spacing of their children, giving them control over their fertility and the ability to better plan their lives.

Addressing the unmet need for family planning helps to reduce population growth over the long term, and is a highly cost-effective strategy for achieving wider development goals. For example, an analysis of 16 sub-Saharan countries found that satisfying the unmet need for family planning can produce cost savings in meeting five of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), across different sectors.

Governments have committed to ensuring voluntary family planning for all

Governments recognize that voluntary family planning programmes are not only crucial for sustainable development but are also a central aspect of the 'right to health'. They have committed to ensuring access to family planning as a fundamental human right through instruments such as the MDGs.

Box 3. Unintended pregnancies and births averted if unmet need were addressed in developing countries (2009)



Despite these commitments, aid for family planning has declined in absolute terms and as a proportion of total aid for health in most developing countries over the past ten years. At the same time, demand has increased (in part due to population growth). There has also been a widening gap in contraceptive use among regions, and even reversals in some countries such as Ghana and Benin.

After four decades of seeing an increase in the use of modern contraception in most countries, there is now a significant risk of losing ground, which will derail sustainable development in many countries. This can be averted through increased funding and commitment to family planning.

WHAT EUROPEAN DONOR GOVERNMENTS CAN DO

- Population dynamics and voluntary family planning should be fully recognized as essential aspects of sustainable development.
- Policymakers, donors and others must increase funding for voluntary, rights-based family planning. This will help to ensure that women, men and young people have the right and ability to freely decide the timing, numbers and spacing of their children.
- Voluntary family planning should be a component of any sustainable development programme, including climate-change programmes, and associated funding mechanisms.
- There must be a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) related to population dynamics and voluntary, rights-based family planning.

Countdown 2015 Europe is a consortium of 16 leading European non-governmental organizations working to address the unmet need for family planning in developing countries. The consortium raises awareness and promotes increased European donor support in terms of policies and funding to ensure universal access to reproductive health and family planning worldwide. For more information, please contact the International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network (IPPF EN) at: countdown2015europe@ippfen.org or visit www.countdown2015europe.org



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