



FACTSHEET: FAMILY PLANNING AND THE ENVIRONMENT STABILIZING POPULATION - SUSTAINING THE PLANET

Family planning, reproductive health care and gender relations could influence the future course of climate change and affect how humanity adapts to rising seas, worsening storms and severe droughts. The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, or ICPD, was a milestone in the history of population and development. The achievement of the ICPD's goal of universal access to reproductive health, in combination with improved education of girls and gender equality, would help achieve health and development objectives while also contributing to declines in fertility, which would in turn help reduce greenhouse-gas emissions in the long run.

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 unplanned 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

- About half the earth's biological production capacity has already been diverted to human use. 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.
- 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 population of Nepal is projected to rise from the current 27 million to about 33 million in 2015. With the population growth estimated to be about 2 per cent yearly, it is projected that in 2050 population will reach about 49 million.
- Fertility reduction in most poor countries has occurred only in the presence of comprehensive family planning programmes. In Nepal, fertility declined from 4.6 births per woman in the 1996 to 3.1 births in 2006, a drop of one and a half births per woman in the past 10 years.
- 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.
- Nepal's contribution to global carbon dioxide emission is close to zero and its forests contribute to CO2 reduction but at the same time the total emission rose from 0.6 Mt (mega tonnes) in 1990 to 3.0 in 2004.
- 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 pressure to use marginal land for food production. For example, the forest area in Nepal is shrinking yearly by 1.6 % from approximately 37% of the area in 1990 to 25.4% in 2005.
- Himalayan glaciers form the largest body of ice outside the polar caps and form a reservoir which supports rivers that are the lifeline of millions of people in South Asia. Glaciers in the Himalaya are receding faster than in any other part of the world.
- 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 Nepal estimated 90% of population had access to improved water sources in 2005 while less than half of it (35%) has access to improved sanitation.
- 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.
- In Nepal, about one in five married women would like to delay or prevent pregnancy but is not able to do so because of either lack of access to information or contraception, misconceptions about contraception or cultural and social factors.
- More than 200 million women in developing countries who would like to delay or prevent their next pregnancy are not using effective contraceptives.
- It is estimated that the \$7 cost of abating a tonne of CO₂ using family planning compares with \$24 for wind power, \$51 for solar, \$57-83 for coal plants with carbon capture and storage, \$92 for plug-in hybrid vehicles and \$131 for electric vehicles.

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.

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.

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.

Main sources for this fact sheet: The Lancet's Maternal Survival and Women Deliver Series (2006/2007); the 2005 World Health Report; and Meeting the Need, 2006, State of World Population, 2001, and other UNFPA publications; Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, M.L. Parry, O.F. Canziani, J.P. Palutikof, P.J. van der Linden and C.E. Hanson, Eds., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 976 pp; Human Development Report 2007/2008, UNDP; Fewer Emitters, Lower Emissions, Less Cost Reducing Future Carbon Emissions By Investing In Family Planning - A Cost Benefit Analysis, T. Wire, London School of Economics, Operational Research, August 2009; Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2006.