



POP Briefs

Population & the Environment: A Delicate Balance

Ensuring the world's people can have a sustainable future includes protecting the natural world and understanding the fragile balance that exists between humans and our environment. Developing countries significantly add to the human population, accounting for 95 percent of the world's annual population increase. Every day 214,000 babies are born. Every week, population increases are equal to the equivalent of a San Francisco; every 15 months, it equals another Mexico (1). At the current rate of population growth, the world's people will face shortages in food and water supplies, deforestation, and poorly managed urbanization and industrialization – all of which pose enormous threats to the environment and to human life.

Ultimately, the health of the planet and its inhabitants depend on the reproductive choices we make today. Family planning programs go hand-in-hand with sound environmental management. An estimated 150 million women want to plan their families, but lack the information and services to do so (4). When family planning information and services are widely available and accessible, couples are better able to achieve their desired fertility. Being able to plan family size not only directly impacts the well being of families, but also means slower population growth and contributes to conservation of natural resources.

Facts and Figures

- In 1999, world population passed 6 billion people. If current rates continue, world population will double by the end of the 21st century (3).
- More than one-third of the world's people live in areas already suffering

from chronic water shortages. This number is projected to increase four-fold over the next 25 years, from an estimated 505 million people today to between 2.4 and 3.2 billion people by 2025 (9).

- Unclean water and poor sanitation kills more than 12 million people a year (5).
- Population is growing faster than food supply. There are currently 800 million malnourished people in the world (6).
- Estimates show that in the past three decades, growing populations have caused 10 percent of the world's agricultural land to be lost due to residential and industrial needs. Worldwide, as many as seven million hectares of farming land disappear each year because of accelerating land degradation and rapid urbanization (5).
- More than half of the world's families are currently living in cities and by 2025 it will rise by more than two-thirds. There are 24 urban areas worldwide with populations greater than 10 million (7).
- Each year, some 40 million acres (nearly the size of Washington State) of tropical forest disappear as trees are cleared for crops, human settlements, and fuel wood (7).

USAID Response

USAID's Office of Population funds a number of special projects that link population, health, and environmental issues. The implementation of family planning services contributes to a reduction in the use of natural resources.



Center for Population,
Health and Nutrition

U.S. Agency for
International Development

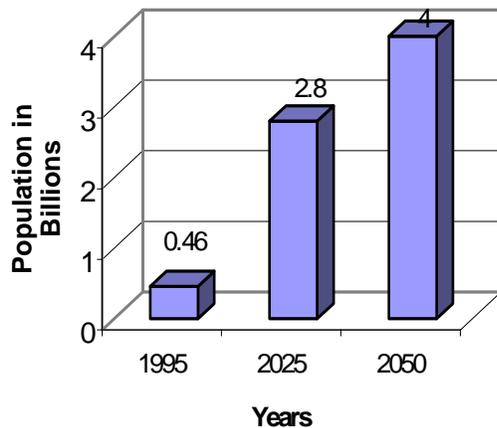
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Population Facing Water Scarcity



Source: *Population Report, Solutions for a Water Short World*

The Environmental Change and Health Outcome Project based in Madagascar links community-based natural resource management with interventions to improve health and family planning in a rural setting, thus allowing for better preservation of the island's unique bio-diversity.

- USAID has worked in Ecuador to address population growth and environmental concerns and needs. In six communities, World Neighbors and CEMOPLAF (Center for Medical Guidance and Family Planning) are integrating population and environment issues by addressing health, agriculture, and natural resource management. They travel to remote rural communities and provide the only available services to teach people about family planning and environmental conservation activities. The communities with integrated programs have seen a significant increase in the acceptance of family planning, as well as the use of sustainable agricultural practices.

- Through CARE and USAID, the Jajarkot Community Based Poverty Alleviation project in Nepal aims to help 22,000 people improve their livelihood security through agriculture and natural resources, health and development activities including primary health care, family planning, and non-formal education.

- In 1996, USAID funded Arcandina, a project that helps children understand the links among population, health, and the environment in Ecuador. This television show uses a jaguar and other animals to promote conservation awareness with the goal being to achieve and sustain positive environmental behavioral changes. Arcandina also helps mobilize children to take action through ecological clubs, a traveling show (a Mobile Ark), education campaigns, community projects such as tree plantings, and advocacy by partnering with other organizations. The surveyed children showed a marked increase in the understanding of environmental degradation and the impact of humans on the environment.

Prepared November 2001

Resources: (1) Population Reference Bureau, 1999 World *Population Data Sheet*; (2) www.familyplanet.org/success.htm (3) National Wildlife Federation: www.nwf.org; (4) Population Reference Bureau, *Family Planning Saves Lives*, 3rd Edition, 1997; (5) Population Report, *Population and the Environment: The Global Challenge*, (series M, #15); (6) United Nations Development Programme: www.undp.org/dpa/specialevents/netaid/kit/poverty (7) Population Report: *The Environment and Population Growth: Decade for Action* (series M, #10); (8) USAID: www.usaid.gov/pop_health/pop/popenv; (9) Population Action International: www.populationaction.org