

Women-Centered Population/Environment Programs

USAID Global Health



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When given the choice, women prefer smaller families. Over time, small family size leads to reductions in natural population growth rates and fewer new households that require natural resources.

Access to family planning is an often overlooked method for providing communities and nations with an alternative way of increasing environmental conservation efforts. Family planning also paves the way for better maternal and child health, as well as household and community health. This, in turn, contributes to economic gains for the household and community, helping pull people out of the cycle of poverty that can lead to destructive environmental practices.

Research and experience have shown that projects that link family planning with natural resource management and environmental conservation result in men being more aware and involved in family planning, which facilitates method acceptance, while women become more engaged in natural resource management to the benefit of all. In addition, communities value projects that recognize these strong links and are empowered to assume a strong stewardship role over the health of their families and the health of their environment.

Understanding the demographic landscape of today's world is crucial to improved environmental sustainability programming with a women-centered approach. Today, the largest generation of young people is coming of age in developing countries. While the rate of population growth has slowed in many regions, overall numbers still increase by 75 million to 80 million every year, the equivalent of adding another United States to the world every four years. A certain amount of future growth is inevitable – an echo of the great boom of the late 20th century. But choices made

by young people today will determine whether the world's population climbs to a number closer to 8 billion or 11 billion by midcentury.

Population growth has a significant effect on the changes we see in our natural environment, but that effect is shaped by a wide range of mediating factors, including technology, consumption patterns, economic policies, and political choices. Environmental challenges, such as climate change, will require an unprecedented mobilization of resources, ingenuity, and a wide range of solutions.

The best way to slow growth is not with top-down “population control” but by making sure women and couples have the means and the power to make their own choices about childbearing. That means, first of all, ensuring universal access to family planning and reproductive health services – which remains elusive for 215 million women around the world.

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Web site

http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/eh/index.html

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