



United Nations Population Fund

Population, Poverty and Climate Change

- ☞ The signs of global environmental change are everywhere. The links between population and environment are complex because they are mediated by development processes. Nevertheless, the connections are undoubtedly critical.
- ☞ Understanding the complex ways in which population and environment affect each other requires consideration of such things as consumption, technology and population growth. It also demands greater attention to such under-rated social concerns as gender roles and relations, political structures and governance.
- ☞ The basic fact is that humanity is a powerful force for change, altering the Earth's landscape and generating massive amounts of waste. As a result, the international community has some serious, far-reaching challenges to address – related to water, food, habitat destruction, global climate change and environmental health effects.
- ☞ Despite the complexity of these relations, there are some clear common grounds for concern:
 - The wealthiest nations, with less than 20 per cent of the world's population, are responsible for the massive scale of natural resource consumption, much of it wasteful, as well as for the bulk of pollution. Affluence, consumption and technology, not just numbers of people, have the greatest impact on the environment.
 - At the other extreme, the destruction of natural resources is occurring most dramatically in poor countries. The urgent need to promote economic growth has led sometimes to environmental corner-cutting.
 - Population, environmental degradation and poverty are also linked: the search for fuel wood, water and other basic needs makes impoverished people unwitting agents of environmental change. Environmental footprints are related to poverty and unfulfilled basic human needs – for tangible things such as fuel, food and water.

UNFPA and Climate Change

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, promotes climate change policies that take into account their broader implications for population dynamics and socio-economic development. It believes that environmental concerns, including climate change, should be mainstreamed into development activities and incorporated into economic, population, health, energy and agriculture policies. They should also feature prominently in policies and programmes that address emergency situations. Enhanced regional collaboration is particularly important since many environmental challenges affect several countries, sub-regions or entire regions.

There is a complex relationship between population growth and climate change. Slowing and stabilizing the rate of population growth may give countries time to take measures to meet people's needs, while protecting the environment through various means. UNFPA helps in achieving that by helping individuals exercise their human right to voluntary family planning and promoting access to universal health, including reproduction health, universal education, women's empowerment, and gender equality. These initiatives enable choice, and experience shows that choice invariably leads to lower fertility, smaller families and slower population growth.

UNFPA addresses issues related to population, poverty and the environment through various measures, including:

- ☞ Policy Dialogue. UNFPA supports policy dialogue and partnerships at all levels to promote policies that address the linkages among population dynamics, resource use and environmental management. It promotes strategies that can mitigate the negative effects of climate change on the most vulnerable populations. The Fund also promotes the mainstreaming of population and environment issues into broader development planning processes.

- 👉 Capacity building. UNFPA works on strengthening institutional capacity at the national level to ensure a better understanding of the linkages among population, poverty and the environment.
- 👉 Advocacy. UNFPA supports advocacy work that reaches out to different government and non-government actors and draws attention to the population-poverty-environment nexus. It supports public awareness and education on the importance of environmental sustainability.
- 👉 Data collection and research. The Fund supports activities that promote the collection, analysis and greater utilization of data for informed environmental decision-making and planning processes, including for urban planning, particularly at local and district levels, and detailed mapping of population and environment interactions.

Through these strategic focus areas, UNFPA also helps countries to better position themselves to eradicate poverty, improve reproductive health and rights, and to advance safe motherhood, gender equality and women's empowerment.

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