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Population Footprints

Population Footprints, the UCL–Leverhulme Trust symposium on human population growth and global carrying capacity, took place in London on 25–26 May 2011. A satellite meeting was hosted simultaneously in Nairobi, Kenya, by the African Institute for Development Policy.

KEY MESSAGES

- 1 The earth's limits are breached by increasing consumption and human population growth, with the potential for severe and negative impacts on health and wellbeing.
- 2 Unsustainable and inequitable patterns of consumption are the most significant driver of the world's environmental problems and must be addressed as a matter of social justice.
- 3 Social inequalities, including wealth, consumption, gender and health inequities, are significant as both drivers and consequences of unsustainable consumption and population growth and present major social and moral issues.
- 4 Family planning is a crucial priority in its own right, yet there is insufficient funding to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, one of the Millennium Development Goals.

Main themes

The UCL-Leverhulme Trust symposium, a high-profile global event deemed to be 'the population event of the year', brought together cross-sector academics, NGOs and activists from the global South and North to debate and address practical policy concerns on a range of inter-related issues of critical importance for the 21st century. Four themes emerged as key messages.

World population growth

- · The world's population has doubled since 1967.
- According to the median projection of the UN Population Division, the world's population will continue to increase to 8 billion in 2025, then onto 9 billion in 2043, climbing to 10 billion in the year 2083.
- The current rate of population growth is adding 78 million people to our planet each year (equivalent to the population of Canada, Australia, Greece and Portugal combined).
- If both fertility and mortality were to remain constant in each country at their current levels, the world population would increase to 18 billion in 2100, from 7 billion today.
- 1. The earth's limits are breached by increasing consumption and human population growth, with the potential for severe and negative impacts on health and wellbeing.
 - Consumption levels and population size, density, growth and other dynamics are inequitably distributed globally, regionally and nationally.
 - While links between population, consumption and sustainability issues are highly complex, both population dynamics and consumption issues are significant. Addressing both growth in population and consumption will therefore be more effective than focusing on either population or consumption alone. A vast range of multidisciplinary strategies are required, including integrated approaches addressing both consumption- and population-related drivers of environmental degradation.

Life expectancy

- Average life expectancy worldwide has increased by 20 years since 1950, from 48 to 69 years today.
- Life expectancy is currently highest for women in Japan and France (at 88 years) and lowest for women in Sierra Leone (at just 35 years).
- · In the UK life expectancy is increasing by 8 hours each day.

- 2. Unsustainable and inequitable patterns of consumption are the most significant driver of the world's environmental problems, and must be addressed as a matter of social justice.
 - Over-consumption by the global North and the rich minority
 of the earth's population (for example, current USA carbon
 emissions per person are 20 times higher than those of
 India) is having the greatest impact upon the world's poorest
 communities and presents a considerable threat to humanity.
 - While both human consumption and population are significant
 for sustainability, growth in consumption has a bigger impact
 on increases in carbon emissions than population growth in
 the short term. Although we talk about 'low carbon growth',
 the current growth model is associated with higher carbon
 consumption.
 - This threat is all the more apparent with the onset of climate change. Although climate change is driven largely by the inequitable rates of consumption of countries of the global North, it is the countries and citizens of the global South that are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Consumption

- Between now and 2030 demand for food is set to increase by 40%, and demand for both energy and water by 30%.
- In developed countries 50% of all food is discarded after purchase, and in developing countries 50% is wasted prior to purchase, due to pest infestations and poor storage etc.
- 3. Social inequalities, including wealth, consumption, gender and health inequities, are significant as both drivers and consequences of unsustainable consumption and population growth, and present a major social and moral issue.
 - Vast and highly unjust levels of wealth in a small minority of the population correlate with high rates of consumption and contribute to environmental degradation and poverty. For example, the richest 10% of adults in the world own 85% of global household wealth.
 - In addition, health and gender inequalities and poverty are key drivers of high fertility and unsustainable population growth.
 - Addressing social inequalities that exist at the local, national and global levels must be prioritised for ethical and moral reasons, as well as to address concerns around sustainable development and population growth.

 Without a considerable reversal of the trend of increasing wealth inequalities, significant progress in addressing problems related to human consumption and population growth is unlikely to be achieved.

Family planning

- Each year there are 75 million unintended pregnancies, 300,000 maternal deaths, and 21.6 million unsafe abortions.
- Every day 1,000 women die from complications of pregnancy and childbirth.
- An estimated 215 million women in developing countries have an unmet need for contraception.
- 4. Family planning is a crucial priority in its own right, yet there is insufficient funding to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, one of the Millennium Development Goals.
 - Many countries of the world where women have a high unmet need for contraception have experienced per capita declines in assistance for family planning by more than 50% between 1996 and 2006, at a time when demand is increasing.
 - Increased investment to expand access to voluntary family
 planning services that respect and protect rights, and other
 sexual and reproductive health services, is urgently required:
 - to address the high levels of unmet need for family planning
 - to improve women and children's health and the realization of women's rights
 - to maximise the potential wider benefits for sustainability.

Ageing population

- Within 15 years half of the population of western Europe will be aged over 50.
- In the more developed countries of the world, about 1 in 4 people are now over age 60. By 2050, more than 1 in 3 will be over age 60.
 In the least-developed countries, one in 20 people are now over age 60.

Further issues

The UCL-Leverhulme Trust symposium discussed a wide range of issues relating to human population growth, exploring both the scale of the challenge and some of the elements of the solutions to it.

Fertility rates

- Today women on average are having half as many children as they did 50 years ago. The world total fertility rate has declined from 5 children per woman in 1950 to 2.5 children per woman today, with wide country variations.
- Fertility rates in Japan, most European nations, Singapore and Russia are 1.5 children per woman or lower. In Afghanistan and many African countries, fertility rates are 5 children per woman or higher.

Understanding population growth and dynamics

The earth's carrying capacity: The concept of an exact 'carrying capacity' of the earth or a particular nation is difficult and highly contentious. Consideration of the 'carrying capacity' is inextricably linked to social values and judgments about how societies choose to use and allocate resources.

Population dynamics: Population dynamics, including urbanization, migration, age structures, density and growth are significant because they influence resource use and consumption rates. They are also linked to health, the environment and the economy. A range of population dynamics, including growth and urbanization, directly affect a country's capacity to adapt to climate change.

Migration: Population dynamics, wealth inequalities and globalisation are key drivers of migration. Migration has clear class, gender and other social dimensions.

Climate change mitigation: Consumption, rather than population, should be the primary concern for climate change mitigation. However, population dynamics are relevant and heighten the challenges of adaptation.

Sustainable development: Development which is solely based on economic growth is unsustainable. Furthermore, a narrow economic concept of development does not value wider, social and cultural dimensions of wellbeing. These dimensions are all essential for sustainable development.

Urban populations

- In 1960, one in three people lived in an urban area; today more than half of all people do.
- By 2045, it is predicted that two in three people will live in cities.

Addressing the challenge

Central consideration of women: Women and their needs must be at the centre of all population-related debates and interventions. Both family planning and empowerment of women are critical priorities in their own right.

Family planning: Family planning must be voluntary, free from coercion and delivered as part of comprehensive, sexual and reproductive health programmes that respect and protect human rights.

Young people: Engaging with young people in the global South and ensuring that their needs for health and education are met is necessary to seize opportunities which will realise the demographic dividend and promote a more sustainable and equitable future.

The developing South: Countries of the developing South are increasingly identifying the need to address unsustainable rates of

population growth and the associated pressure on resources as a key development priority. They are also looking at these issues as a strategy for increasing their capacity to adapt to climate change.

Technology and innovation: The use of technology and innovation is critical for achieving progress towards sustainable use of the earth's resources. Technology and innovation have great potential to contribute to a green economy, sustainable agriculture and an overall sustainable development path.

Population Footprints, 25–26 May 2011 www.populationfootprints.org

Almost 300 delegates and 35 speakers and chairs took part in Population Footprints, the UCL–Leverhulme Trust symposium, representing a total of 33 countries. The many world-renowned speakers, including academics and representatives of multilateral and non-governmental organisations were extremely well received by an equally diverse and multi-disciplinary audience. The opening sessions in London were linked to the satellite meeting of 100 delegates in Nairobi, Kenya, hosted by the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP), in partnership with the Government of Kenya and various local agencies.

The symposium succeeded in fostering debate and bringing different perspectives and policy approaches to a range of complex and often contentious issues related to the main themes: consumption, reproductive health and rights, climate change, 'sustainable' growth, ageing, migration and other population dynamics.

Speakers brought diverse insights and regional perspectives to issues relating to population, environment and consumption footprints,

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contributing to the first day's theme of 'More than numbers'. A lively and popular panel discussion 'Population growth: problem or hype?' provided an energetic and – at times – heated end to the first day. The second day of the conference 'From numbers to action' proved to be just as dynamic, provoking discussion on connections at both national and regional levels between wealth inequalities and issues relating to ageing and migration, as well as consideration of effective public health interventions, economic planning challenges beyond 2015, and policy and research directions.

On 27 May a smaller follow-up meeting was attended by 64 experts who were speakers and delegates of the symposium, to explore ongoing opportunities for advocacy, public policy engagement and collaboration.

