

Ethical Dimensions of Addressing Global Population Issues

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Ethical Principles

- Principle of Individual Liberty
- Utilitarian Principle
- Principle of Justice

Population and the Environment

- Complex relationship
- Have to recognize different consumption patterns in the use of the world's non-renewable resources

Have to recognize the “Yuck” factor

- History of population/family planning; horrendous mistakes; global memories are long in respect of forced sterilization, transistor radios, coercion
- Cairo was a victory for women’s health concerns, and the holistic reproductive health message, but only we understand that term, and family planning didn’t take care of itself...

Elephant on the table

- Population not quite polite to discuss – elephant on the table in several global development discussions at present
- Have to find a way to stop it being the topic that dare not speak its name

Policy vacuum

- Immigration in the UK
- Sex selection in our field now

Did the “problem” go away?

- UN medium projections
- Assumptions that family planning programmes are in place
- People/donors “bored” with family planning
- Commodities

Must history repeat itself?

- We must retain the support of the women's health movement for sexual and reproductive health and rights work
- We must retain a rights-based approach that respects and protects the rights of individual women and men
- None of that is incompatible with advocating a nuanced policy response to global population issues

Key complexities

- Population and climate change/
environmental issues
 - Not the same thing, although there is
sometimes overlap
- Population variables
 - Household size
 - Age and sex composition
 - Population density

Even if the link was clear and simple...

- How can we in conscience blame population growth in the South and ignore the fact that climate change has been driven by the actions of the rich world?

So, where does that leave us?

- Population growth makes it more difficult to achieve MDGs
- Climate change affects poor people disproportionately
- These factors combine to hinder efforts to lift people out of poverty

Policy considerations

- How useful is the silence on population
 - Can we bring this issue in from the cold?
- Can we find a language that recognizes, reflects and addresses the need to emphasize resource consumption in the North at the same time as advocating increased access to sexual and reproductive health care services in the South

Rights

- Who remembers “Development is the best contraceptive?”
- Is the right to decide freely on the number and spacing of their children truly being exercised by, for example, women living in the Philippines who have 12 children.

We won't find the answers...

- If we don't have the courage to ask the questions
- If we don't trust our instincts; we know how important it is to respect and protect the rights of women, men and children
- If we continue to believe that caring about rights is intrinsically incompatible with searching for ways to harmonize global population with consumption of the world's non-renewable resources
- If we fail to recognize that we have been partly responsible for this silence. Let us find the courage to break it now