

## *Commission on Population and Development*

### **Topic C: Population, Environment, and Development**

#### **Introduction**

The Economic and Social Council created the Population Commission in 1946. In 1994 the General Assembly chose to re-focus the mission of the Commission, and to memorialize this, changed the name to the Commission on Population and Development (CPD). The work of the Commission is guided by the Programme of Action from the International Conference on Population and Development. The Commission has a membership of 47 Member States elected by ECOSOC with four year terms. Since 1994 the Commission meets once every year. As its title suggests, the CPD addresses a variety of topics related to population and development, including the issue of the environment, which is one of the major concerns of the international community today.

#### **Background**

##### *International Conference on Population and Development*

At the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994, the international community acknowledged the interdependence of the environment, population and development. They highlighted the ripe opportunities to create integrated policies which recognize this interdependence and take advantage of available resources in technology in both scientific and indigenous knowledge. As this was the era when the *Right to Development* was formally acknowledged, the conference in Cairo took the opportunity to state the importance for the pursuit of this right to development with balance of all factors: environment, population, and development. The emphasis weighed heavily on how this interdependence would play out in drafting policy on a national level.

The report of the ICPD highlights specifically the challenges of environment and population. Resource degradation and depletion are connected with demographic characteristics, such as concentrations of poverty or over-population in a particular geographic area. Rapid population growth and migration can also cause unexpected impacts on the physical environment. Governments were called to think of integrating all issues in national activities and address unsustainable production and consumption. When tackling poverty, they were urged to assure income generation strategies were considered for those in volatile ecosystems. Member States were directed to use demographic data when making decisions that will affect resource management.

##### *Agenda 21*

The International Conference on Environment and Development which was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 produced a seminal document: *Agenda 21*. *Agenda 21* devotes its 5th chapter to "Demographic Dynamics and Sustainability." The text is clearly the predecessor to much of the agreements written at ICPD about the interrelationship between demographics and

environmental sustainability as the text has many parallels. The three main program areas selected in this document express the international focus on these issues in the early 1990s: 1) Building knowledge on the link between demographic trends and sustainable development and distributing that knowledge. 2) National policies for environment and development which adequately address demographic trends. 3) Programs at the local level are implemented with adequate inclusion of demographic trends.

Within these program areas many details are addressed. Consumption patterns were of concern to the body and how policies can be written to address environmental concerns with changing demographics. A country's ability to assess their demographic breakdown, not just to assure adequate resources, but also to consider larger environmental and developmental goals, was particularly emphasized. It also recognized that specific assessments of vulnerable groups should occur. In this case, the groups should be analyzed to predict future changes in their demographic breakdown which may affect their use of resources and how this will have a ripple effect on the state of the environment for the nation.

### *Global demographic trends*

Basic demographic data about international population trends highlights the current major trends in the population field. World population is expected to reach 6.6 billion in 2007 and will ultimately stabilize around 9 billion. Most countries, developed and developing, have experienced significant reductions in fertility as contraceptive use has increased. In countries with low fertility, international migration becomes more important as a source of population growth. Globally, the number of persons over 60 will more than triple in the future from 705 million in 2007 to 2 billion in 2050. In the future the population will be largely urban. In 2008, half of the world population will be urban for the first time in history, progressing from almost 3.2 billion in 2005 to 4.9 billion by 2030.

### **Current Situation**

#### *CPD's direct address of Environment, Population and Development*

For each session CPD selects a focus topic of discussion. Its 34th session (April 2001) was the most relevant recent session for the topic at hand: Population, Environment and Development. The meeting produced several documents to document the work done thus far and direct the Commission on these issues moving forward. A major outcome of the meeting is the *Report of the Secretary General: Concise Report on world population monitoring, 2001: population, environment and development* (E/CN.9/2001/2). The document treats these three interactive issues from many perspectives, sometimes with a lean towards particular population issues and in turn a lean towards environmental issues. As mentioned above, by 2008 half of world population will be urban. Section VI. Addresses "Population, environment and development in urban settings" and the specific issues raised within this realm. Also from this meeting is draft resolution (E/CN.9/2001/L.4) where discussions of the meeting were documented. The conferences mentioned above in "Background" were cited, as well as details on the handling of the research capacity of the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

The Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division created a Population, Resources, Environment and Development Databank (PRED Bank). Information is available on a variety of issues within population, labor force, education, economic development, land, water and energy use. The information is collected on a regional, sub-regional and country basis. The Population division monitors and assesses a wide span of issues in the field of population. It does this to serve intergovernmental bodies and individual governments so it is a natural focal point for the PRED Bank. The PRED Bank is another example of tools the UN created in response to early calls for nations to use information to develop national policies that address the three integrated issues under discussion.

### *Role of the Millennium Development Goals*

The goal which most directly relates to this topic is: United Nations Millennium Development Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability. There are two targets:

1) Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; reverse loss of environmental resources and 2) Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.

For this topic an extremely relevant report called *Environment and human well-being: a practical strategy* was produced by the Millennium Project's Task Force on Environmental Sustainability. The report is organized around 10 major recommendations. The recommendations cover agriculture, forest management, freshwater, fisheries, air and water pollution, global climate change, governance, and market failures. As is evident, the report focuses primarily on environmental issues, but seeks to look at them with a balanced view for the human element, and therefore how sustainable development can occur simultaneously with environmental protection. This recently published report provides an important perspective and a wealth of information on integrating the three topics of environment, population and development.

### *Role of Specialized Agencies and other UN bodies*

During its 14th Governing session, the United National Environmental Program (UNEP) addressed the problem of population. Many comments about national policy paralleled what was heard in the major international conferences addressing population and environment. UNEP called on relevant UN agencies to assist nations in gathering data and developing the policies and programs which will address the issues caused by the interplay between population and its impact on the environment. UNEP also highlighted the increase in "environmental refugees" which are those displaced because their environment can no longer sustain their livelihood and thus support the needs of their families. UNEP also suggests that natural resources, use of water and use of land should be monitored so changes can be anticipated and allow for plans to be in place to balance population distribution where possible. In addition to calling on national governments and UN agencies, UNEP also calls on private enterprises, in particular industry, to take an active role in carrying out policies and programs which address the issues raised by population's stress on the environment.

As mentioned above much of the talk in the 1990s addresses national policies which address environmental and population issues in an integrated manner. UNEP responded with a key tool, the Global Environmental Outlook (GEO), begun in 2003. The tool is the collection of information with scientific backing that can be used for policy making. It highlights its strengths as an integrated approach, one which brings together the scientific knowledge with an awareness of how information must be developed to be used for drafting and implementing policy. This can be extremely useful for national policy makers when questioning the issues of environment, population and development. GEO uses five guiding questions in its work: 1) What is happening to the environment and why? 2) What are the consequences for the environment and humanity? 3) What is being done and how effective is it? 4) Where are we heading? 5) What actions could be taken for a sustainable future?

The United Nations has a single-issue dedicated organization, the United Nations Forum on Forests, which was created in 2000 and which aims to bring together forest stakeholders and serve as a focal point for work on forest related issues. Agenda 21 defines nine major groups who have a significant stake in sustainable forest management. These include populations which are forest dependent, and are broken into some demographically defined groups, such as Women and Young Children. This group is an interesting example of the United Nations focusing its work on one environmental issue instead of the broad-based work of organizations like UNEP. Deforestation is a common issue when talking about unbalanced population growth and its effect on the environment; UNFF may offer solutions to this.

The UN Fund for Population and Development (UNFPA) takes a strong country-based approach to these integrated issues. UNFPA places specific focus on poverty alleviation. The triage of these issues is done in two ways by UNFPA: linking population and poverty in pursuit of development, and linking population, poverty and environment as what will lead to environmental sustainability. As you can see, UNFPA looks at these issues in an integrated fashion to assist Member States in the development of their own national policies. UNFPA focuses on the plight of those in poverty and living on "low potential" land. The poor are also most affected when an environmental crisis hits. Finally, the UNFPA focuses on environmental issues that relate to basic human needs, such as food and water security. This approach can be contrasted with work of UNEP and UNFF.

Specialized agencies not dealing directly with population or environment are also drawing connections between these deeply integrated issues, particularly because of the pervasive focus on sustainable development in the UN. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) produced a paper studying the relationship between population and deforestation to test if the correlation between increased population growth and increased deforestation was a causal relationship. This is then taken a step further to see how this could suggest we could improve forestry, population or development policies, by Alain Marcoux, a Senior Officer of the FAO Population Programme Service (SDWP) 2000, who outlined these specific issues in the FAOs "Population and Deforestation."

The financial sector would be remiss to not address these topics. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) does address both topics, but not in an integrated fashion. The IMF recently put out a working paper called "Economic Transformation, Population Growth and the Long-Run World

Income Distribution" by Marcos Chamo and Michael Kremer. The paper considers a theory of development where developing country growth relies on their ability to trade with developed nations, and that their ability to trade relies on population growth trends. This links population and development, and is not a directive or policy of the IMF, but instead a publication of research. To address environmental concerns, the IMF has posted a statement of its position, clearly showing their focus on financial stability and economic development. A major link they highlight is that the economic development policies they pursue have a major tenet of sustainability - a long-term view. This has an intuitive connection with environmental sustainability, while not a direct link to earth-friendly policies. The second major link they highlight is that often the policies that are best for the environment are best for economic growth, such as expensive and ineffective pesticides which negatively impact the environment and don't lead to growth in the agricultural sector. It is for each nation to decide, based on their position, if these policies are adequate.

### **Future Outlook**

These three issues are deeply entrenched in much of the work of the United Nations. The Secretariat, specialized agencies, international conferences, ECOSOC and the General Assembly have all considered these issues. Follow-ups to the international conferences will continue when the integrated approach to these issues can be directly addressed. Member States are continually called to move forward on a national level based on the directives written collectively by the international community.

### **Focus Questions**

- 1) What major environmental issues face your Member State?
- 2) What is the history of population growth in your Member State? What is the opinion on contraception and other forms of population management? How has this growth and management affected the environment?
- 3) Which of these three issues receives primary focus in your national policy? in your region?
- 4) What should the international community do to control the environmental externalities caused by population growth and international migration?
- 5) What role should specialized agencies play to assist countries and to coordinate with the UN system on these issues?
- 6) How can development strategies integrate concerns for the environment and population?

### **Resource list, following topic order above**

Final Report of the ICPD, A/CONF.171/13, 18 Oct 1994

Report of the Secretary General World Demographic Trends E/CN.9/2007/6

[www.un.org/esa/population/cpd/cpd2001/comm2001.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/population/cpd/cpd2001/comm2001.htm)

Concise report on world population monitoring, 2001: Population environment and development 2/6 April 2001 E/CN.9/2001/2

[www.unpopulation.org](http://www.unpopulation.org)

[www.un.org/esa/population/publications/predbank4/predbank.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/predbank4/predbank.htm)

[www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/tf\\_environment.htm](http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/tf_environment.htm)

[www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=100&ArticleID=1674&l=en](http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=100&ArticleID=1674&l=en)

[www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=43&ArticleID=28&l=en](http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=43&ArticleID=28&l=en)

[www.unep.org/GEO](http://www.unep.org/GEO)

[www.un.org/esa/forests/index.html](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/index.html)

[www.unfpa.org/pds/sustainability.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/pds/sustainability.htm)

[www.unfpa.org/pds/index.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/pds/index.htm)

Population and Deforestation, by Alain Marcoux Senior Officer, FAO, Population Programme Service (SDWP), 2000

Economic Transformation, Population Growth and the Long-Run World Income Distribution, by Marcos Chamon and Michael Kremer, IMF, January 2006.

[www.imf.org/external/np/exr/facts/enviro.htm](http://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/facts/enviro.htm)