



SAFEGUARDING THE ENVIRONMENT

The health and well-being of people is closely linked to the well-being of wildlife and the health of our global environment. The link between population growth and the environment is complex: rapid population growth, increased urbanization, and over consumption of resources combined put enormous pressure on the environment. However, when couples have access to family planning services, they tend to choose to have smaller, healthier families. By having smaller families we can ease the demand for water and arable land, preserve biodiversity and vital habitat, and limit pollution—improving the prospects for a healthy environment for both people and wildlife worldwide.

HERE ARE THE FACTS:

- More than 90% of the world's population growth is occurring in the developing world, where rapid increases in population and rising demand for natural resources is putting tremendous stress on the environment. Most developing countries are already cultivating virtually all arable land and are bringing ever more marginal land under cultivation. Developing nations also have a huge unmet need for family planning services—over 100 million married women of reproductive age in those nations indicate that they would prefer to postpone childbearing but are not using any method of contraception, according to Johns Hopkins University.
- High consumption, industrialized nations have an enormous environmental impact worldwide. More forest has been cleared since 1850 than in all of human history, and the loss is concentrated in developing countries—both to meet the demand for wood and paper by the industrialized world (the 20% of people in the world's highest-income countries consume 84% of all paper products) and because wood is a main source of energy for nearly 3 billion people (90% of wood harvests in Africa, 80% in Asia and 70% in Latin America are used for fuel).
- Population growth puts global biodiversity at risk through the degradation and destruction of wildlife habitats. With the impact of rapid population growth and increased population density in many countries, wild species are becoming extinct 50 to 100 times faster than they naturally would. One in four vertebrate species is on the verge of extinction or already extinct; 25% of mammals, 11% of birds, 20% of reptiles, 25% of amphibians and 34% of fishes are currently threatened.
- Per-capita water consumption is rising twice as fast as world population. At least 300 million people live in regions that already have severe water shortages; by 2025, the number could be 3 billion. Some 20 countries already suffer from water stress, and water's global availability has dropped from 17,000 cubic metres per capita a year in 1950 to 7,000 in 1998.

Resources: Johns Hopkins University Center for Communications Programs, *Why Family Planning Matters*, Population Reports, Series J, No. 49, Baltimore, MD, July 1999 (www.jhuccp.org/pr/j49edsum.stm); National Audubon Society, *Population and Habitat in the New Millennium*, Boulder, CO, 1998 (www.earthnet.net/~popnet/); Population Action International, *Forest Futures*, Washington, DC, 1999 (www.populationaction.org); Population Action International, *Nature's Place: Human Population and the Future of Biological Diversity*, Washington, DC January 2000; United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1998*, New York, 1998 (www.undp.org); Worldwatch Institute, *Earth Day Report Card*, Washington, DC, March 2000 (www.worldwatch.org).