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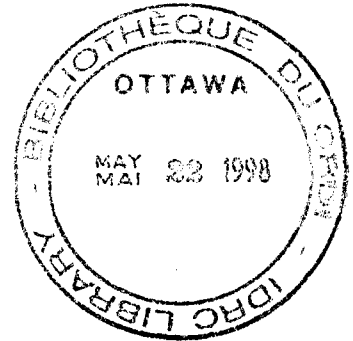
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CHAPTER 5

Demographic Dynamics and Sustainability

— Theodora Carroll-Foster —



THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

Global population growth estimates have recently been revised upwards by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) from 5.7 billion in 1992 to 6.4 billion by 2001, and between 8 and 9 billion by 2020. UNFPA forecasts that population growth will not plateau until 2045, at over 11 billion. Other forecasts predict a plateauing at closer to 13 billion, a result of the sheer momentum of population growth, even at stabilized rates, and the inadequacy of family planning and social programs and policies in many countries. Ninety-five percent of this growth will occur in developing countries, making it increasingly difficult for most Third World governments to keep pace with their peoples' growing needs for development services (health, education, potable water, sanitation, waste disposal, liveable cities, etc.) and a better quality of life.

Some of the fastest growth (an average of 6% per year, or three times average world population growth rates) will occur in cities such as Mexico City, Shanghai, Cairo, and Rio de Janeiro, where infrastructure is already inadequate, where socio-economic problems are pervasive, and where the majority of inhabitants lead qualitatively unsustainable lives. Even countries like Canada are experiencing population pressures, due to accelerating growth in urban populations - in Canada's case from 5.5 million in 1931 to 19.4 million in 1986, and over 20 million in 1992. Seventy-seven percent of Canada's population is now urban, with the majority of people concentrated in its four largest cities.

Massive migration between rural and urban areas have created further demographic problems for many governments which are already faced with the formidable task of supplying food for food-deficient urban populations, while simultaneously experiencing declines in food security. This trend has diminished the quality of life in both urban and rural environments, and is contributing to such problems as local and transboundary air pollution, ozone depletion, global warming, excessive energy use, solid and hazardous waste disposal problems, deteriorating water supplies and quality, and loss of productive agricultural lands.

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The environmental impact of people is not only based on their absolute numbers but on their prevailing consumption and production patterns. The present scale of consumption by developed countries and the rising scale of consumption among some developing or newly industrialized countries are putting increasing pressures on both the Earth's sources and on its sinks or its ability to absorb the waste products of growing numbers of humans.

PROGRAM AREAS AND OBJECTIVES

Chapter 5 contains the following three program areas:

- (1) developing and disseminating knowledge concerning the links between demographic trends and factors and sustainable development;
- (2) formulating integrated national policies for environment and development, taking into account demographic trends and factors; and,
- (3) implementing integrated environment and development programs at the local level, taking into account demographic trends and factors.

The three program areas focus on the links between demographic trends and factors, the environment, the integration of demographics and population issues in the analysis of environment and development issues, and associated policies needed to deal with such issues. The suggested activities in the chapter include research on building and strengthening national databases, the development of measurements of population-related damages to the environment and sustainability, the impact of population on critical resources (water and land), and environmental factors (eco-system health and biodiversity). The activities also deal with the analysis of demographic processes, such as the dynamics of population-age structure, the impacts on resources, and the impacts of migrations on the environment.

The suggested activities recognize the need for reproductive health programs to reduce maternal and infant mortality and the need for information on family planning. Also recognized is the need for appropriate and feasible population policies as part of broader policies that deal with such factors as eco-system health, technology, human settlements, socio-economic structures, and access to resources. These programs and policies should be aimed at simultaneously preserving a more sustainable future and coping with the present needs of people.

CANADIAN POSITIONS AT RIO

1. Official Canadian Position

Developed countries, including Canada, pointed out the importance of integrating family planning and population programs into economic development programs if sustainable development was to be achieved. The G-77 countries, supported by the Holy See (Vatican), disagreed.

One of Canada's objectives at UNCED was to establish clearly that overpopulation is an environmental issue, and that the resolution of population problems is a key to sustainable development. The emphasis placed on the importance of the economic status of women in dealing with population programs and the need to involve men in education programs, was a Canadian objective met in this chapter.

The issues in Chapter 5 have serious political implications because many deal with culturally and socially rooted reproductive values and behaviours and require locally developed and culturally integrated survival strategies. In many developing, rapidly growing, poorly managed societies, the delicate decision on what resources to sustain first, human communities or the environment, is usually made, deliberately or otherwise, in favour of the former at the expense of the latter. To reverse this trend there is a need to address structural, deeply rooted patterns and dynamics which involve economic, social, political and cultural determinants associated with human reproduction.

2. Non-Governmental Organizations

Within the Canadian NGO community, attitudes on population varied greatly. Some sectors of civil society had very strong positions on population.

- Environmental organizations were concerned with the interlinkages between population and the environment. They used the concept of carrying capacity and the Holdren-Ehrlich equation to demonstrate the need to stabilize human numbers, while recognizing the overwhelming impact on the environment and consumption patterns in the North.
- Women's groups insisted that the, "population problem had more to do with women's rights to informed reproductive choice, and access to reproductive health services including safe and legal abortion." The empowerment of women was the underlying theme, and was important in and of itself. To some, population activists seemed to perceive gender equality as a means to an end.
- Development NGOs saw population growth and migration as a manifestation of inequities within and between nations. The social justice\human rights ends of this approach integrated most of the women's groups concerns and analyses. Semantics were important: "population control" was condemned, whereas reproductive, maternal and child health care strategies, including family planning information and services, were called for, within the wider framework of development, human rights and empowerment of women and communities.

Canadian NGOs largely agreed with the content of the NGO Treaty on Population, Environment and Development (*see below*).

3. Business and Industry

Canadian business and industry supported the official Canadian position on this chapter. The urban trends currently under way in Canada and indeed globally will have a major impact on the future development of both national and transnational industries.

4. Indigenous

Many Indigenous Peoples reported populations around the world are declining whereas the focus of sustainable development is fixated on the issue of expanded overpopulation in the developing world. Indigenous Peoples have called for the protection of their cultural, territorial and political rights as a means to protect their shrinking populations as well as invaluable indigenous knowledge which is vital to the future for sustainable living.

COMMITMENTS MADE BY CANADIANS**1. Legally-Binding Documents**

None.

2. Political Pronouncements

None.

3. Alternative NGO Treaties and Kari-Oca**NGO Treaties**

At the same time as UNCED, two major international events were also held at Rio: the International Non-Governmental Organization Forum (Global Forum), and the Kari-Oca Conference. At the Global Forum, 3,100 NGOs discussed a number of matters related to environment and development and produced a parallel set of documents: an NGO Earth Charter and 39 Alternative NGO Treaties. Canadian NGOs played a significant role in developing the treaties and took a lead in coordinating their dissemination. Of these treaties, two addressed the issues discussed in Chapter 5.

Global Women's Treaty for NGOs Seeking a Just and Healthy Planet

This treaty presents the population problem as an issue of women's reproductive rights.

Treaty on Population, Environment and Development

The position taken by this treaty is that population should be framed as an issue of women's reproductive rights. NGOs at the Global Forum asked for women-centred, managed reproductive health care; safe and legal voluntary contraceptive and abortion facilities; sex education and information for all children; and, programs that educate men on male methods of contraception and their parental responsibilities. The NGO community also advocated increased access to, and availability of, child care facilities and parental leave and care for the elderly and disabled as family support services. Further, the treaty stated that all scientific experimentation related to reproduction should be open and accountable with respect to the concerns of women.

In the NGO Treaty on Population, Environment and Development, there is no acceptance of the urgency to reduce population growth, as development NGOs and Southern groups insisted that such an analysis may lead to blame the most vulnerable groups (typically the poor rural women in the South) and may call for coercive fertility control mechanisms.

Kari-Oca

The second alternative forum at Rio was the International Conference on Territory, Environment and Development (the Kari-Oca Conference). The Kari-Oca Conference was held immediately prior to UNCED by and for the world's Indigenous Peoples. More than 650 Indigenous representatives participated in meetings and cultural events during the conference, where they also developed and adopted a 109-point Indigenous Peoples' Earth Charter.

Within the *Indigenous Peoples' Earth Charter*, Indigenous Peoples emphasized that they must be free from enforced population transfer. Population transfer policies by state governments in many indigenous territories are causing extreme hardship, due to traditional lands being lost or developed without regard for Indigenous Peoples' natural and cultural heritage and with traditional livelihoods being manipulated or destroyed by outsiders.

DEFICIENCIES, GAPS AND CONSTRAINTS WITHIN CHAPTER 5

This chapter is concerned almost exclusively with research, assessment, monitoring, and information gathering and sharing. Operational recommendations are weak, and build on the smallest common denominator, with minimal compromise. The issue of abortion is not addressed.

Chapter 5 barely touches on the need to learn from, or evaluate, past population policies or programs, especially given the incorporation of environment into population and economic policies and vice versa. However, it encourages governments to share their experience on the implementation of Agenda 21 at the United Nations Conference on Population and Development in September 1994 in Cairo, Egypt, although it does not specify mechanisms for collecting, comparing and analysing lessons learned.

Chapter 5 says little about the experiences learned from or the urgent need to evaluate, previous population policies that have been implemented with minimal success over the last three decades. By adding the environment component to population policies, or adding population components to environmental policies, some policy researchers and decision-makers fear that the risk that such policies might fail is increased, hence the need to build on previous experiences is urgent and relevant.

Human beings, demographic dimensions, quality of life, and other terms are vaguely defined in the Chapter and give rise to contradictory interpretations depending on social, political or religious contexts. In fact religious constraints, inhibitions or dictates about population issues, family planning and contraception are barely alluded to, despite their pervasive influence on populations generally and policy-makers specifically.

While Chapter 5 recommends increased research into various aspects of demographic dynamics, it may be argued that research should also be directed at ways to reduce the growth rate of the planet's population. Indeed, terms such as "family planning" and "contraception" do not appear at all in Agenda 21. Despite this weakness, the activities suggested in this chapter are nonetheless necessary to develop appropriate policies which encourage sustainable development. As such, the merit of these activities should not be diminished. What is missing, however, is some resolution on the importance of controlling growth of the global population. If the global population is indeed a "crisis" as many believe it to be, then it should have been treated as such in Agenda 21. One of Canada's objectives which was not met, for example, was to seek to gain national and international recognition of the importance of reproductive health service availability in developing countries.

In part, the lack of attention devoted in Agenda 21 to the population problem may be attributed to the religious and political sensitivities associated with a discussion of population growth. Moreover, given that the population problem is expected to be fully addressed at the International Conference on Population and Development to be held in Cairo in 1994, there was an added incentive not to address population issues in great depth at UNCED. Hence, although serious discussion of the population issue was held in abeyance for two years, it is hoped by many countries, including Canada, that work can begin on understanding more about the demographic factors which are associated with population growth and associated environmental stresses. This work will undoubtedly be a useful input to the Conference on Population and Development. The chapter itself suggests that governments and other relevant actors could report on the status of their activities related to population at the Conference, as well as share their experiences in the implementation of Agenda 21. The chapter also states that its recommendations should in no way prejudice discussions at this forthcoming Conference.

In summary, the chapter succeeds in providing a framework for future action to combat the problem of overpopulation. The question is whether governments will demonstrate the political will to commit the necessary resources to deal with the world population crisis before it is too late. Where the chapter appears weak, (largely as a result of pressure from specific interest groups), is in the provision of specific remedies to the problem of overpopulation. However,

Agenda 21 is generally lacking in specificity and so Chapter 5 does not appear unduly out of place in this regard.

In general, Chapter 5 has been viewed by the international community as relatively unimportant, at least in view of the upcoming International Conference on Population and Development. The last paragraph in the Chapter states: "The recommendations contained in this chapter should in no way prejudice discussions that the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994, which will be the appropriate forum for dealing with population and development issues...".

COMPARISON BETWEEN CURRENT CANADIAN GOVERNMENT POLICY AND COMMITMENTS MADE

Because no specific commitments were made with respect to population and because no overarching population policy exists in Canada, no comparison can be made.

Canada, in contrast with the majority of developing countries, does not have a comprehensive population policy and/or program as such. It has various policies and/or programs that relate to an aspect or component of population (e.g., immigration, refugee assistance, humanitarian aid, labour, etc.). Between 1985 and 1990, an estimated 17% of CIDA's aid was used to, "support projects designed to reduce, directly and indirectly, population growth". Approximately, C \$225 million was spent on population, family planning and other demographic projects. During the period between 1971 and 1992, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) invested over \$42 million in population and development research projects, especially in the areas of fertility and family planning, population trends and problems, census methodologies and training, and the development of quantitative population databases. Since the late 1980s, IDRC retrenched in the population field, but continues to support the development of a contraceptive vaccine by India's National Institute of Immunology and is preparing for the United Nations Population Conference in Cairo in 1994.

CANADIAN ACTIVITIES EVOLVING THROUGH THE SUSTAINABILITY PROCESS

In order to implement the activities in this chapter, between 1993 and 2000 US \$7.1 billion per year are needed, including US \$3.5 billion from the international community on grant or concessional terms. Few government or non-government institutions in Canada are specifically addressing the population issue. If they are, they are only able to allocate rather limited resources (financial or otherwise) due to competing demands, pressures for scarce resources, and/or recalcitrance.

A multi-sectoral non-governmental National Advisory Council (NAC) has been formed to provide NGO input into the national and international preparations for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The NAC-ICPD advises the Canadian Government, through a consultative process, on the positions that it adopts relative to the objectives and issues of the ICPD as well as on the Canadian National Report on Population which is being prepared for the ICPD Secretariat. The Council is also involved in information

dissemination, awareness raising, development of NGO dialogue, consensus-building, public outreach, and cultivating political support for discussion of, and action on, these issues.

OTHER RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY-RELATED FORA

- Independent Commission for Population and Quality of Life
- The Population Council
- United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD)
- United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP)
- United Nations Family Planning Association (UNFPA)
- United Nations Population Fund
- United Nations International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), Cairo, September 1994.

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Independent Commission for Population and Quality of Life, 1, rue Miollis, 75732, Paris, Cedex 15, France, tel (33-1) 45.68.45.72, fax (33-1) 40.61.91.36.

International Development Research Centre, 250 Albert Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1G 3H9, tel (613) 236-6163, fax (613) 238-7230.

United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development, Department of Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, Room S-3060, United Nations, New York, N.Y., 10017, USA, tel (212) 963-5959.

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PROJET DE SOCIÉTÉ

ASSESSMENT OF
AGENDA 21
DOCUMENT AND INFORMATION
COMMITTEE

ÉVALUATION DE
L'ACTION 21
COMITÉ DE LA DOCUMENTATION
ET DE L'INFORMATION

TOWARD A NATIONAL
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGY FOR CANADA

VERS UNE STRATÉGIE NATIONALE
DE DÉVELOPPEMENT DURABLE
AU CANADA

THIRD NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS ASSEMBLY
DECEMBER 16-17, 1993, OTTAWA, CANADA
TROISIÈME ASSEMBLÉE DES INTERVENANTS NATIONAUX
LES 16 ET 17 DÉCEMBRE 1993 À OTTAWA, CANADA



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1 - Preamble to Agenda 21	1
Chapter 2 - International Cooperation to Accelerate Sustainable Development	3
Chapter 3 - Combatting Poverty	25
Chapter 4 - Changing Consumption Patterns	35
Chapter 5 - Demographic Dynamics and Sustainability	45
Chapter 6 - Protection and Promotion of Human Health	55
Chapter 7 - Promoting Human Sustainable Settlement Development	73
Chapter 8 - Integration of Environment and Development in Decision-Making	85
Chapter 9 - Protection of the Atmosphere and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change	103
Chapter 10 - Integrated Approach to the Planning and Management of Land Resources	115
Chapter 11 - Combatting Deforestation and the Forest Principles	127
Chapter 12 - Combatting Desertification and Drought	137
Chapter 13 - Sustainable Mountain Development	147
Chapter 14 - Promoting Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development	157
Chapter 15 - Conservation of Biological Diversity and Convention on Biological Diversity	169
Chapter 16 - Environmentally Sound Management of Biotechnology	185
Chapter 17 - Protection of Oceans and their Living Resources	193
Chapter 18 - Protection of Freshwater Resources	213
Chapter 19 - Environmentally Sound Management of Toxic Chemicals	229