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MILLENNIUM ALLIANCE FOR HUMANITY AND THE BIOSPHERE

On March 23/24, 2014 the Population Media Center and the Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere co-hosted an expert workshop on the role of global population levels in environmental degradation and the threat of collapse.

Our underlying concern was the “perfect storm” of problems now facing humanity and the gap between our understanding of the problems and the failure of governments, institutions, and individuals to develop new patterns of behavior that will reverse the current trends. The storm includes lethal and escalating threats posed by the destruction of our life support systems traceable to current global population size and growth, and overconsumption by wealthy individuals and nations, and manifested by climate disruption, toxification of the planet, resource wars, widespread poverty, financial crises, and a growing gap between rich and poor (to name just some of the most prominent). Even though scholars in the natural and social sciences have extensively explored the issues and worked with civil society to produce popular books, films, blogs, and lectures, human beings and their many enterprises continue to deplete natural capital at rates far faster than it can be replenished, to degrade essential ecosystem services, and place society on an increasingly dangerous trajectory.

Our goal was to explore the feasibility of fostering a 21st century social movement addressing one driver of these interwoven threats: population levels.

After attending the workshop, Dr. Alaka Basu brought to our attention your draft SDSN indicator report, which addresses these issues from a comprehensive perspective and lays out indicators and frameworks for pathways to achieving sustainable development within planetary boundaries.

Working with the organizing committee of the workshop and with input from Professor Basu, we would like to suggest you consider including the following indicators under Goal 2c. We realize that some of these indicators relate to other goals and targets, but we have not cross-referenced them for co-benefits. The suggested indicators are:

- Proportion of population with unrestricted access to contraceptive knowledge and supplies within 10 kms of their homes;
- Availability of a full spectrum of ‘modern’ methods of contraception through official family planning programs;
- Proportion of schools offering age appropriate sex education beginning in primary school;
- Legal status of abortion;
- Access to safe abortion services and post-procedure care;

- Proportion of women who say they have full voice in determining the number of children they have, including factors such as domestic and sexual violence and coercion;
- Proportion of girls getting married before the age of 18;
- Proportion of women whose desired fertility rate is lower than local replacement level fertility.

A fundamental concern of ours is that if we, as global citizens, are truly concerned about sustainability, our measures dealing with population dynamics must reflect the fact that sustainability and equity cannot be achieved unless global TFR falls to less than replacement level. This was a key conclusion of the workshop, and confidence was great that this can be achieved within a human rights framework, humanely, equitably and with the values necessary for healthy societies.

We recognize that we are entering your conversation on population and planetary boundaries in the eleventh hour; however, if we can be helpful in any way, please let us know.

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