

Programming Population Dynamics: Rutgers' position

By the close of this century, our planet will be home to some 11.2 billion people, which is a 50% increase compared to today, due to reducing mortality rates, increasing life expectancy, high fertility rates and early pregnancies in certain regions. This growth will take place disproportionately. Many developed countries are seeing rapid population aging and will soon face the issue of depopulation. On the other hand, population size may quadruple in Sub-Saharan Africa. The rapid population growth and age structures have important implications for the demand for public services, economic development, political and social stability and the environment. The rapid population growth combined with an uneven distribution of resources will lead to an unsustainable future.

The need for quality family planning services is all the more urgent today because more than 1.2 billion young people ages 15 to 24 are entering their reproductive years, comprising about 18% of the world's population—the largest adolescent contingent in human history. At the same time, an estimated 214 million women worldwide want to avoid pregnancy and plan their families but lack access to modern contraception (unmet need). Meeting this unmet need would avert 67 million unintended pregnancies annually. Family planning does more than help women and couples determine the size of their families: It safeguards individual health and rights, saves lives, preserves natural resources, and can improve economic outcomes for families and communities.

In the absence of a more recent but similarly progressive development agenda, the Programme of Action (PoA) from the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, Cairo 1994) is guiding Rutgers' perception and understanding of SRHR and informing the development and implementations of SRHR interventions, including family planning programmes. The PoA recognizes contraceptive information and services as essential to ensuring reproductive health and rights. It reaffirms that "the aim of family-planning programmes must be to enable couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information and means to do so and to ensure informed choices and make available a full range of safe and effective methods." Additionally, the Committee on the Rights of the Child emphasizes that "States parties should provide adolescents with access to sexual and reproductive information, including on family planning and contraceptives, the dangers of early pregnancy, the prevention of HIV/AIDS and the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)."

The work carried out by Rutgers within the population dynamics realm is characterized by a rights-based and multi component approach, that engages men and boys, with a specific focus on young people, family planning (access to contraceptive methods) and safe abortion. Empowering women and engaging men to choose the number, timing, and spacing of their pregnancies is not only a matter of health and human rights but also impacts population growth and touches on many multi-sectoral determinants vital to sustainable development, including women's education and status in society.