

Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals, 4th Session

19 June 2013 – Health and Population Dynamics

Sustainable World Initiative

Supplement to 1-minute statement from the floor

Of the human development factors—population, technology, and consumption—population is oft neglected in the UN sustainable human development discourse. We hear the common paradigm that human population trends are unalterable fate; that, no matter what investments we make, there will be 9.6 billion people living on our planet in 2050, and 11 billion people by next century. However, we would like to highlight one of the overarching messages from the Technical Support Team Issues Brief on population dynamics: “Demography is not destiny.” We respectfully implore the Open Working Group to **consider human population as a critical variable** in the design of the SDGs, determined by the voluntary choices of individuals, particularly by women.

At Sustainable World Initiative, we are investigating the linkages between sexual and reproductive health and rights, population dynamics, economics, and natural resources. We have conducted case studies on an economically and geographically representative collection of nations. Our investigations focused on future public expenditures in education, health, and infrastructure including water and sanitation, telecommunications, energy, and transportation. The nations studied include Norway, India, the United States, Niger, and Bolivia. **Across all nations, North and South, developing and developed, incremental investment in sexual and reproductive health and rights programs, including voluntary family planning programs expanding individual choice and opportunity, yield a 5- to 20-fold return in public expenditure savings by 2030.** The Open Working Group should encourage further investigation of similar cost-benefit analyses, in order to better understand the needed funding for implementation, and how the future benefits can be reallocated to other areas.

These highly cost-effective sexual and reproductive health and rights investments are more than good economic sense. **They can contribute to stabilizing populations, and relieving already excessive pressures on our planet’s finite resources.** We can put ourselves on a path toward true sustainability, but we must act now and act globally. The Open Working Group should consider all policy options at our disposal, in order to reconcile our myriad goals including ending poverty and hunger, facilitating economic growth for all nations and individuals, and protecting scarce natural resources within planetary limits. For the sake of our children and youth, and for the sake of all future generations, **sexual and reproductive health and rights investments are a crucial means to supplement sustainable consumption and production patterns.** Only by emphasizing the benefits of sexual and reproductive health and rights for population dynamics will we facilitate the achievement of the socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable societies for which we are all striving at the Open Working Group.

We therefore support the inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals of a target for **ensuring women's access to integrated, voluntary sexual and reproductive health and rights, including voluntary family planning programs expanding individual choice and opportunity**. To measure progress on this target, we would also support the inclusion of an indicator measuring the unmet need for family planning. This should be measured not only at national levels, but also disaggregated by region, socioeconomic status, and age.

We understand the challenge that the Open Working Group faces in funding such programs in the context of trade-offs and the politics of existing or competing public expenditures. While our research shows that the investments in sexual and reproductive health and rights more than pays for itself, there is, of course, the question of obtaining the initial funding to initiate these investments. Sustainable World Initiative would like to support the comprehensive funding plan presented by the Major Group on Children and Youth during Tuesday's civil society meeting. These proposals include **redirecting subsidies from fossil fuels, a global tax on polluting industries, and reductions in military spending**.