

Population Stabilization

Although, according to most demographers, global population is expected to increase for a few more decades, population stabilization will be reached when birth rates decline to the same level as mortality rates. Clearly global population stabilization is important for helping to achieve sustainability because an ever-increasing population (1) puts direct pressure upon animal habitat, forest and marine ecosystems and individual populations and (2) demands increased supplies of energy, metals, minerals and agriculture, which in turn leads to increased pollution of landscapes, water and air.

While noting the importance of population stabilization as a key element towards seeking sustainability, it must be emphasized that the question becomes what standard of living and level of consumption can the earth's natural systems sustain with a stable population. Assuming that demographics projections are correct that around the middle of the century the global population will stabilize at between nine and ten billion, numerous studies have concluded that a sustainable standard of living would have to be less than the present material consumption in the U.S. and western countries.

Population Stabilization: Up Close and Personal

Undoubtedly no sustainable concept is more "up close and personal" than "population stabilization". There is probably nothing that humans like more than children, unless perhaps it is grandchildren! Of course no one wants to be told how many children to have, as has sometimes been the case in some countries and cultures. From the perspective of population stabilization, the birth rate may vary from country to country dependent upon the age structure of the population and economic prosperity. And the impact of the population upon sustainability, through consumption of resources and generation of environmental pollution, varies greatly from country to country dependent upon affluence. In this regard in the United States, one person is equivalent to several hundred in many of the poorer developing countries.

In the United States the approximate family size to achieve population stabilization is about two children. Clearly, appropriate family planning practices and adoption procedures can promote population stabilization everywhere.