

Population — Some Policy Implications

To move towards sustainable population levels, it will be necessary to achieve an absolute reduction in numbers. This is difficult to achieve without economic and social dislocation, which is why we have to work on it carefully now. In the U.S., where death rates are low, an average fertility rate of about 2.1 or fewer children per couple is required.ⁱ Some possible policy directions are outlined below:

- Sustainability education. A sustainability curriculum should be developed and required in the schools. NGOs already have examples available.ⁱⁱ
- Family planning education. Programs providing practical information about family planning have become controversial with the rise of fundamentalism. We need to find ways to disseminate this information widely that are broadly acceptable to all segments of society.
- Informal education. One example: a United Nations program has had good success working family planning issues into soap operas shown on TV in countries that have been resistant to family planning.ⁱⁱⁱ Sustainability information could be worked into movies, TV shows, music, and art, much the way product placements are already.
- Incentives. Both the U.S. and Missouri tax codes directly subsidize unlimited numbers of children with tax credits and deductions.^{iv} To control population, subsidies could be phased out after 2 children, and the revenue generated could be used to provide family planning services for those who can't afford it. Similarly, educational subsidies could be reduced or eliminated after 2 children (e.g. Hope accounts, Lifetime Learning Credits, Coverdell accounts, etc.).^v
- Social welfare. Demographic conversion is caused by economic and health security, women in the workplace, and women having the right to control their own reproductive capacity.^{vi} Policies that support these goals could be encouraged.
- Family planning services. To control population, people have to have access to family planning services. This does not mean that one must support abortion. Being one of the least desirable methods of birth control, abortion is an issue that must be evaluated on grounds other than population control. It is fine to stress abstinence first, but sterilization, IUDs, and oral contraceptives should be available. Condoms are only partially effective for contraception, but are valuable for disease prevention.^{vii}
- Effective immigration policy. As they assimilate, immigrants and their descendents adopt American consumption habits.^{viii} Thus, from a population control perspective, we do not make progress if we reduce our birth rate, but allow uncontrolled immigration. We need to find a policy that is fair, but that effectively controls immigration, especially from countries with high birth rates.
- Both India and China have attempted limits of 1 child per couple; these efforts have been problematic. The Chinese policy has had success in reducing population growth, but both programs led to draconian abuses (infanticide of female babies and kidnapping of women for forced abortion and sterilization, for example). Forced limits are NOT acceptable.^{ix}

Many of the policies outlined above would be controversial. As a people, we need to find ways to think and dialog about the sustainability consequences of lifestyle choices like unlimited childbearing.

ⁱ Fertility rate refers to the number of offspring produced by women over their lifespan, on average. If a woman produces 2 offspring, they replace her and her spouse. But since some children die before adulthood, a slightly higher number is required to achieve stable population. In most industrial nations, 2.1 is the approximate replacement rate.

Total fertility rate. Wikipedia. Viewed online 10/2007 at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fertility_rate.

ⁱⁱ For an example of an education program on population, see [Hwww.populationeducation.org](http://www.populationeducation.org).

ⁱⁱⁱ For information on the U.N. program embedding family planning information in TV programs, see Population Communications International, [Hwww.population.org](http://www.population.org).

^{iv} Regarding current pro-large-family incentives, see IRS Form 1040 and Missouri Form 1040. The IRS provides a tax credit of \$1,000 per child. Missouri provides a tax deduction of \$1,200 per child. For a discussion of Singapore's experience using population control incentives see *Singapore population control policies*. Library of Congress. Viewed online 9/15/2007 at [http://lweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+sg0041\)](http://lweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+sg0041)).

^v For a brief summary of various education tax advantages that could be adjusted as part of a population control incentive program, see a summary prepared by the University of Missouri Cashier's Office:

http://cashiers.missouri.edu/education_tax_credits.htm.

^{vi} The causes of demographic conversion discussed by the NGO Population Connection, see [Hhttp://www.Populationconnection.org/About_Us/policies](http://www.Populationconnection.org/About_Us/policies).

^{vii} The largest provider of family planning services in Missouri is Planned Parenthood, and they have extensive educational services, as well.

^{viii} Zeng, Shen. (2004). *The economic assimilation of Asian immigrants: A longitudinal study*. Madison, Wisconsin: Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

^{ix} *One-child policy*. Wikipedia. Viewed online 10/2007 at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One-child_policy.