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In Uganda—a country with one of the world’s highest total fertility rates at 6.5 children per woman—rising demographic pressures over recent decades have affected the health of rural populations. Population growth has also led to environmental degradation and heightened the vulnerability of local wildlife populations.<sup>59</sup> Given the strong linkages between these problems, the nation’s rural southwest has been an ideal testing ground for integrated PHE efforts that principally focus on family planning.

Conservation Through Public Health (CTPH), a community-development program active in the region surrounding Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, has spearheaded efforts to promote contraceptive use as a means to enhance public health and sustainability.<sup>60</sup> CTPH has trained volunteers in the region to deliver family planning information, monitor the prevalence of illnesses like tuberculosis (which can be transmitted to livestock and wildlife, including gorillas), and highlight the need for environmental preservation to protect the region’s lucrative ecotourism industry, which is largely based around Bwindi’s endangered mountain gorilla population.

Educational efforts by CTPH and its partners have emphasized that families with fewer children not only place less strain on local soil and woodland resources; they also enjoy higher living standards. It is a message that has started to gain some traction in target communities. However, promoting family planning in Uganda has been challenging, particularly since in many rural areas cultural and religious norms opposing contraception remain deeply entrenched. Additionally, rural Uganda for the most part lacks reliable health care infrastructure, so that even when family planning tools and services are offered, significant (and challenging) travel may be required to access them. One of the ways CTPH hopes to overcome this hurdle is by training volunteers in local communities to provide family planning services during house calls.

Despite the Ugandan government’s support of family planning outreach efforts, more partnerships need to be made in the country’s rural areas—and more reliable funding secured—before integrated family planning and environmental protection efforts can have a real and measurable effect. With Uganda’s population slated to jump from 33.8 million to 53.4 million by 2025, it will be critical that integrated PHE efforts gain visibility and traction in the country.

## Ethiopia

Like Uganda, Ethiopia also faces the dual challenges of rapid population growth and environmental degradation.<sup>61</sup> For years, single-sector interventions have been prioritized in the realms of public health, sustainable population growth, and responsible environmental stewardship. Far fewer initiatives, however, have sought to address relationships between these challenges using a cross-sectoral approach.

One of the leaders in this regard has been the Environment and Development Society of Ethiopia (LEM Ethiopia).<sup>62</sup> This citizens’ group has been active since the early 1990s, advocating a holistic approach to providing adequate family planning services and adapting to climate change and resource scarcity. Other leading organizations using similar approaches include the Relief Society of Tigray (REST), located in the northern region of Tigray, and the Ethio Wetlands and Natural Resource Association (EWNRA), located in Ethiopia’s Wichi watershed.<sup>63</sup>

Increasing the availability of family planning tools and services has been identified as a vital component of all integrated PHE interventions because of Ethiopia’s particularly rapid population

growth, which is projected to rise from its current 85 million to upward of 173 million by 2050.<sup>64</sup> If handled improperly, such growth could generate significant social, political, economic, and environmental instability.

LEM Ethiopia, REST, and EWNRA have sought to increase awareness about the country's rapid population growth. They educate communities about the pressing need for sustainable use of soil and forestry resources and the availability and use of family planning to meet their desired family size. Other aspects of these organizations' cross-sectoral programming have included the promotion of energy-efficient cooking fuels, agroforestry, watershed management, composting, and solar electricity. Collectively, these outreach initiatives have enhanced the quality of life in Ethiopia's densely populated regions and reduced communities' physical effects on the local environment.

## Next Steps for Population-Environment Programs

Leaders of family planning, environment, and climate change initiatives are often uncomfortable working outside narrow constructions of their respective problems and proposed solutions. Bringing population into environmental efforts (or vice versa) is met with a variety of objections. Others recognize connections, particularly in the analytical realm, but when it comes to advocacy campaigns, messaging, and field-based programs that require clear measurements of success on established timelines, organizations and policymakers become more circumspect about integrated efforts.<sup>65</sup> Narrow bureaucratic funding structures also perpetuate this limited perspective.

Beyond the practical challenges of integrated approaches, a number of policy land mines are related to wider critiques of family planning and population programs. However, the environmental component raises some additional challenges for framing responses. A careful consideration of these critiques will help prioritize the ways to utilize these population-environment links to support U.S. assistance in international family planning initiatives.

Loaded language can undercut the effectiveness of the population-environment arguments. “Overpopulation,” for example, explicitly implies limits to growth based on straight per capita resource calculations that do not account for consumption. The overpopulation frame often produces backlash from the rights-based organizations and from those opposed to contraception and government involvement in family size.<sup>66</sup>

Yet, despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities for addressing population-environment links in proactive ways that highlight empowering women and families. Making voluntary family planning services part of an integrated package of development interventions helps vulnerable populations make tangible progress in addressing their multiple challenges.

At the same time, providing family planning services within an empowerment—rather than penalty—context helps avoid a range of analytical and political criticisms. Empowerment within a human rights-based and women-centered approach avoids making overreaching claims when addressing complex, multicausal problems, such as climate change. Positioning family planning within adaptation and vulnerability approaches helps meet developing-country goals and avoids the perception of imposing developed-country conservation or mitigation agendas. Through community-based, integrated approaches to population-environment links, policy and program interventions can avoid these pitfalls and move forward at household, community, and state levels.

## About the Author

**Geoffrey D. Dabelko** is the director of the environmental change and security program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. He is also an adjunct professor at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. He has also held positions at the Council on Foreign Relations and served as a lecturer at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. For nearly two decades, Dabelko has facilitated dialogue among policymakers, practitioners, journalists, and scholars grappling with complex links between environment, population, development, conflict, and security. He directs his program's Health, Environment, Livelihoods, Population, and Security (HELPS) project, a five-year effort supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development. Dabelko is the editor of the annual *Environmental Change and Security Program Report*. He holds a BA in political science from Duke University and an MA and a PhD in government and politics from the University of Maryland.

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