

**DO POPULATION DYNAMICS AGGRAVATE FOOD AND  
NUTRITION INSECURITY?  
MONITORING CHANGE IN COMPLEX TIMES**

Dear Forum Members

I am **Charles Teller**, a sociologist-demographer/ecologist who has taught, lived and worked as a social scientist and multidisciplinary planner/evaluator of food, nutrition, health, population and development programs in over 50 countries in the Latin America, Asia and Africa. I am currently Visiting Scholar at the Population Reference Bureau in Washington, DC, as well as adjunct associate professor of Population and Development, Institute of Population Studies, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia (where I lived from 1994-2002).

Given my experience and interest in population and human development issues, I would like to launch a discussion on the **population-food-nutrition and development linkages**. As a starting point, I would like to bring your attention on the today's most hotly debated issues:

1. Ideological bias: The Malthusian pessimists and the Bosrupian/Simonian optimists have often clouded an impartial analysis of the population-food-nutrition linkages. The 2008 World Food Day pundits were either split on whether population was “the most important factor in the increase in the number of undernourished people in the last 5 years” (eg, J. Sachs at the Oct. 2008 Dublin Food Conference), or didn't mention it at all.
2. Muddy FS/N indicators: The conceptual confusion over the valid and reliable measurement of the outcome FS/N indicators was pronounced: the international analysts had a “milk shake” of negative impacts: starvation, famine, hunger, food insecurity, food stress, food poverty, undernourishment, lack of dietary diversity, undernutrition, underweight, stunting, wasting, GAM, SAM, excess nutritional mortality, and vitamin/mineral deficiencies.
3. Unreliable measurement of the demographics of FS/N change: reliable and timely demographic, surveillance and information on specific acute and chronic vulnerable groups was often not available for policymakers. Thus the media and advocacy organizations often “cherry-pick” the data they need to make their case or sell their product! However, the long-term trends in sub-Saharan African in “stunting” show more positive evidence that about one-third of the countries have had significant improvements (PRB, October 2008), and that most of the increase in the undernourished since 2000 are found in the most fragile states (eg., DRC)
4. Multiple demographic dynamics and human development: there are at least five dynamics at macro and micro levels:
  - 1) population size and growth rates;
  - 2) spatial distribution, population-land/natural resource density;
  - 3) migration and urbanization;
  - 4) family size, fertility and birth spacing; and
  - 5) Age distribution, youth bulge and ageing.

All five should be considered as demographic factors that effect household food security and nutrition, and whether positively or negatively depending on the context and vulnerability and resilient of the particular population group.

5. Broken international systems to address FS/N: see the recent Lancet series on international nutrition (Black et al, Lancet, 371, 2008), the very recent Blog on the “Failed leadership in health sector..” (Teller, in: <http://aphaih.wordpress.com>). A recent paper by the Center for Global Development on the “Global Nutrition Landscape” highlight a crisis on international players as disconnected from country priority-setting, policy-making and implementation systems.

To inform these discussions and form the basis for further action, I look forward to hearing your experiences and insights as to the following:

1. What **types of analyses** do you have about the recent **effects/impacts of demographic dynamics** on specific and different food/nutrition insecure and vulnerable populations within a country? Are they related to the current global energy, food, and financial crises? Do these dynamics either significantly **aggravate and/or help these vulnerable populations** in their resilience and resourcefulness? How? Please provide specific sources of information in support of your contribution
2. **Who, when and where are the most vulnerable population groups**, communities and agro-ecologies **affected by demographic changes** in the size, distribution, structure and composition? How these changes influence their resilience, local capacity and resourcefulness? Please identify the specific groups.
3. What are the **policy and program responses** (if any) to these various population trends and its implications on FS/N in your country (e.g. family planning; land reform; rural resettlement; food safety nets)? Are the population dynamics adequately taken into account and which of the dynamics seem to be prioritized by decision makers? Have there been good evaluations (if any) of policy response effectiveness?

I have learned from many of you in the FSN forum who work at local level and are intimately struggling with the complexity of these every changing contextual situations. I would most appreciate learning from reliable, representative, timely and responsive **demographic and food/nutrition/health information systems** (of any type) **which track seasonal and yearly changes in population dynamics** of vulnerable populations and households, and case studies of the remarkable resilience and local capacity to withstand frequent shocks.

Your responses and information will be most useful to our work on this topic in Ethiopia. Your contributions will indeed generate a valuable source of information that can contribute to new ideas and the collection of concrete experiences on the linkages between population dynamics, food security/nutrition and socio-economic development and cultural change. It will also have relevance to other countries in Africa and South Asia.

Looking forward to hearing from you!

Charles Teller