

Lecture Steve Sinding
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Abstract

The world has changed greatly since the 1960s and 1970s, when there existed a virtual consensus among Western experts that rapid population growth in the developing world represented a serious global crisis. This crisis mentality gave rise to large-scale family planning efforts that were sponsored and supported by Western donors. As population growth rates began to decline and as both experts and some political leaders increasingly questioned idea of a population crisis, the crisis mentality began to give way and there arose in its place a different rationale for programs, one grounded in individual reproductive rights. This shift was confirmed by the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. One unintended consequence of the shift from a sense of demographic imperative to a rights-based justification for publicly supported services has been a steady decline in funding, both from donors and from developing country budgets themselves. Other more pressing priorities have arisen to displace family planning and reproductive health services. The lecture argues that a serious consequence of this retreat is a dimming of prospects that the Millennium Development Goals can be met and urges that achieving the MDGs should replace the earlier population crisis mentality as the overarching rationale for supporting sexual and reproductive health and rights programs, including first and foremost reinvigorating family planning services.