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How to combine dual aims of reducing population growth and a rights-based noncoercive approach - In Reply

To the Editor:

We thank Dr. Smith for his interest in our editorial. His questions center around whether messages about the environmental impact of population control should be included with individual contraceptive counselling and, if so, is this consistent with a rights-based approach to family planning.

In general, couples make contraception decisions informed by cultural, religious, and individual preferences modified by economic and social considerations. Patients rarely ask for clinical recommendations on these matters that fall outside of the clinical encounter. On the other hand, government policies make profound differences in most areas of life, including the ability to decide if and when to have children. Providing education to policy makers about the links between population growth and the environment with a unified message supports choice and voluntary uptake of services. Even in developed countries like the United States, federal programs that enable couples to access contraception have a significant impact on unintended pregnancy rates. [1,2]

Unfortunately, the population crisis may limit the opportunity for truly voluntary family planning. The decisions made in China during the “one-child policy” reflect such a crisis and provide a cautionary tale of the social cost of neglecting the population/environment nexus. [3,4] On a large scale, it is government policies that ensure the availability of all family planning services without cost, including abortion, that will enable society to fully address the impact of population growth on environmental issues.

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