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The wave of the future? Youth advocacy at the nexus of population and climate change

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In recent years, young activists under 25 have increasingly advocated slowing global population growth through family planning as a climate change strategy. While this approach is developed and disseminated by population and development NGOs, young advocates transform the debate by asserting their role as activist leaders on issues of climate change, population, and women's empowerment. This article explores the logics and discursive strategies employed by a group of transnational youth during a workshop at the sixth annual Climate Change Conference of Youth (COY) as well as training workshops in the USA. It tracks the practices through which young climate change activists engage demographic-climate studies and broader development discourses as a basis for advocacy to influence international population and family planning policies. I argue that development paradigms, activist discourse, and new demographic-climate studies represent both an expansion of the range of issues considered under the climate change umbrella, and simultaneously a narrowing of understandings of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) issues for women through the technicalisation of women's rights.

KEY WORDS: youth activism, climate, NGOs, population, gender

Introduction

At the 2010 Cancun meetings of the International Climate Change Conference of Youth, or COY6[1], one workshop in particular stood apart from others on the agenda. Entitled 'Youth support sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for a just and sustainable world', the event promised to equip young activists with advocacy solutions for both climate change and global population growth through an emphasis on family planning, SRHR, and women's empowerment[2]. Workshop organisers emphasised youth leadership, arguing that young people occupy a particularly important position in turning the tide on both global population growth and climate change. A policy document supporting the workshop reinforced this point, proclaiming that 'meeting the SRHR needs of young people around the world can help stabilise population and contribute to comprehensive strategies to reduce CO2 emission'. Drawing on a study published earlier that year, authors of the document underscored the importance of family planning as a climate strategy: 'by meeting the demand for voluntary family planning, global emissions will be reduced by between 8 and 15 percent'[3].

While the SRHR focus set it apart from other COY6 activities, the workshop took place within a broader discourse, situating climate change in the contexts of population, family planning and women's reproductive health. The new millennium witnessed a dramatic increase in newspaper articles, media reports and scientific studies linking women's fertility, family planning and global population growth to climate change and other environmental issues. According to one survey, newspapers, magazine articles and blog posts citing the terms 'population growth' and 'environment' or 'climate change' increased fourfold in the 3-year period from 2005 to 2008 (Verilli and Piscitelli 2008). Population growth, it seems, is 'back' on the public environmental agenda.

Moreover, population advocacy in the new millennium often has a woman's face, with prominent women's rights advocates emphasising universal access to contraceptives as a necessary component of women's rights and a key addition to the climate change toolkit. In a November 2010 interview on ABC's 'Nature's edge', Gloria Steinem argued that 'the overpopulation is still the biggest reason for global warming, for all the pressure on the environment', adding that allowing women to make their own decisions about childbearing has direct and beneficial

impacts on the environment. Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and a prominent women's rights and climate justice advocate, was quoted at Durban's COP17 meetings speaking in favour of family planning, noting that 'if we were to solve this problem we would not only help these women . . . we would also do great work for the climate' (Goering 2011).

These arguments echo, albeit in revised form, the long-familiar neo-Malthusian narratives that have served as a justification for population control efforts in earlier decades. While Malthus argued in the late eighteenth century that human population growth outpaced the earth's ability to sustain life through food provisioning, neo-Malthusians in the twentieth century broadened and expanded these arguments, blaming population growth for everything from soil erosion to deforestation, food insecurity and climate change. At the heart of Malthusianism is the assumption of a universal human whose resource consumption behaviour is everywhere equivalent – thus equally comparable across space and time, and subject to universal claims about the environmental benefits of population reductions.

In the mid to late twentieth century, neo-Malthusian calls among American foreign policy experts for global population control influenced coercive foreign policies, from the withholding of food aid to hungry populations, to incentivised or even forced sterilisations of women and men in several global South countries (Connelly 2008; Ross 1998; Hartmann 1995). Neo-Malthusian demographic goals also played a key role in the development and expansion of international family planning as a core component of US foreign policy (Halfon 2007; Connelly 2008); however, this approach has since fallen out of favour, due in large part to women's transnational activism. Shifts in the 1990s changed the paradigm of international population and development policies and program interventions, replacing demographically driven population control with an emphasis on the sexual and reproductive health needs of the individual woman (McIntosh and Finkle 1995). Comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education, voluntary access to a range of contraceptive methods, and an emphasis on women's and girls' education are now central components of international population and family planning interventions (Mazur 2010; United Nations 1995).

At the same time, suggesting that the pace of climate change can be slowed through providing universal access to contraceptives relies on a reductive logic in which women's fertility – not the conditions of capitalist production and consumption – is the fundamental driver of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions[4]. While the approach is familiar, in the case of climate change, the stakes are more dramatic. Climate change discourses are based on narratives of impending ecological crisis, one in which abrupt, irreversible change is a possible outcome, thus demanding a global response (Peet *et al*. 2011). Among the responses are an overemphasis on scientific knowledge and technological interventions, to the exclusion of those emphasising complex decisionmaking, local governance, and the conditions enabling or preventing technology adoption (Tanner and Allouche 2011).

The growing presence of strategic linkages actors make between population and climate change rests in part on the promise offered by new scientific knowledge. A spate of new demographic studies links women's childbearing directly to GHGs and identifies contraceptive provision as an important climate change mitigation strategy (O'Neill *et al*. 2010 2012; Murtaugh and Schlax 2009). Several contrasting studies demonstrating the opposite conclusions have been disregarded by population advocates, who selectively choose which facts to cite as the evidence for their claims. However, this strategic selection of science is a key component of population-climate advocacy, in which scientific knowledge production and policy advocacy are a tightly linked set of strategies, reinforcing each other in an effort to reduce controversy and win support for family planning policies (Sasser 2011). While the scientific evidence linking population growth, family planning and climate change is complex and contradictory, related advocacy efforts are unequivocal in their messaging: promoting family planning and SRHR for women are necessary and important strategies to reduce both population growth and climate change.

Why do these groups wish to win support for family planning policies? And why is an emphasis on climate change necessary to strengthen their advocacy approach? This article explores the relationship between policy advocacy and scientific knowledge in defining women's SRHR as a strategic climate change mitigation solution. In it, I argue that activist discourse, development paradigms and new demographic-climate studies represent both an expansion of the range of issues considered under the climate change umbrella, and simultaneously a narrowing of understandings of SRHR issues for women. While SRHR advocates articulate gender equality, women's rights and reproductive health as key components of multi-sector climate change strategies, they circumscribe the conditions through which these goals can be achieved by focusing on technological solutions. In this context, population-climate advocacy enacts what I refer to as the technicalisation of women's rights. The article proceeds in three sections. In the first section, I explore the broadening of discourses of, and scientific production on, climate change. The second section draws on ethnographic observations of young population-climate advocates, analysing how they draw on their knowledge of climate change projections and policy advocacy approaches to strategically reposition women's SRHR as an urgent global priority. The third section situates population-climate advocacy in the broader context

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of development politics and paradigms. The conclusion discusses the possibilities and limitations of a technicalisation of women's rights approach.

This research on population-climate advocacy is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2009 and 2010. Over the course of 20 months, I conducted participant observation at eight workshops and training courses in California, Washington DC and Cancun, Mexico, focused on policy advocacy linking international family planning, environment and climate change (including COY6). These activists served as either volunteers or employees of international environmental, women's and public health NGOs engaged in international family planning policy advocacy. College student activists were also engaged in campus clubs and activities focused on climate change, conservation and women's SRHR.

In addition to this ethnographic research, I conducted 25 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with young activists and NGO workers, which allowed me to more fully understand the perspectives that led young activists to become involved in population-environment advocacy, as well as the motivations, worldviews and development frameworks that motivated NGO workers. Interviews lasted approximately 45 min to an hour, and were digitally recorded and transcribed when possible. When digital recordings were not possible, I took copious notes on informant's comments. My observations allowed me to witness and analyse many of the interactions between young activists and NGO trainers, and participate in ongoing conversations with research informants about development paradigms, climate change science and SRHR policy. More specifically, I was able to become familiarised with the everyday discourses through which young activists linked population growth, family planning and gender to climate change and other environmental issues.

Climate change and the great population debate

Attention to climate change issues has spread well beyond the bounds of climate science and regulatory frameworks, attracting actors who have brought a wide range of institutional and policy concerns to the table, including everything from economic development to human rights, gender equality and human health. While this climate change 'bandwagoning' (Jinnah 2011) may reflect strategic decisionmaking for constituencies with dwindling resources, it also serves to broaden the range of issues associated with climate change. As a result, new perspectives, alliances and organising strategies may be brought to bear on climate issues in ways that expand the possibilities of engaging issues comprehensively (Wapner 2011). This in turn opens up possibilities in which climate change has multiple meanings to multiple constituencies whose scientific and political priorities are vastly different.

In the case of population and family planning, attention to climate change has produced new possibilities for scientific research and advocacy, as well as creating new possibilities for multi-sector development strategies. There have been several recent studies conducted by scientists of different disciplines, working at the nexus of demography, energy use and carbon emissions. In one such study, earth systems scientists analysed an integrated model projecting long-term global demographic trends alongside those of carbon emissions, arguing that slowing population growth overall would have a significant impact on reducing emissions: 'By the end of the century, the effect of slower population growth would be . . . significant, reducing total emissions from fossil fuel use by 37–41%' (O'Neill *et al*. 2010, 5). The study concluded that slowing global population growth *overall* can serve as a key climate change mitigation strategy, reducing carbon emissions as much as a million megatons by 2100 (O'Neill *et al*. 2010, 5). Several other studies published around the same time offered somewhat different perspectives. For example, biostatisticians Murtaugh and Schlax (2009) analysed the 'carbon legacies' or projected lifetime emissions of individual women and all of their future progeny, comparing them by country and region. They found an *inverse* relationship between individual childbearing and per capita GHGs, meaning that countries where women bear the fewest children are most often those with the highest rates of per capita GHGs and the highest carbon legacies. According to this model, the average American woman's carbon legacy (lifetime emissions of each woman and her future progeny) is more than 85 times that of an average woman in Nigeria, a country with a much faster population growth rate than the USA. In another study focused more closely on energy use, an urban development researcher found that over a 55-year period, nations with rapid population growth had little GHG growth. Rather, his analysis demonstrated that GHGs were driven by the growth in consumers and levels of consumption, across world regions (Satterthwaite 2009). A more recent study by economists confirms these results, finding that changes in world GDP were the closest proximate drivers of carbon emissions. The study found no relationship between short-term world population growth and emissions (Tapia Granados *et al*. 2012).

This growing body of data offers a wide range of competing conclusions based on differing assumptions and disciplinary perspectives, yet public discourse linking women's fertility and climate change focuses primarily on O'Neill's approach – a model which assumes a universal human resource user. Following this model, translating complex ideas about climate change, women's reproductive health, and population into a single technical model focused on family planning makes sense – if resource consumers are the same everywhere, then it would follow that

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reducing the number of consuming humans would have similar impacts, regardless of location and social context. This also brings up questions about the knowledge practices guiding development policy-making. Development project-making and policy-making possess their own internal logics prioritising the creation and extension of expert knowledge and a reliance on scientific and technical interventions to address social and political problems (Li 2007; Mosse 2004; Mitchell 2002; Ferguson 1994). Knowledge production in development, thus, occurs in political and institutional contexts that are often quite distant from intended beneficiaries of policy and program interventions. As Roe (1991) argues, the conditions for the success or failure of development projects around the world are highly uncertain and often ambiguous. As a result, the 'pressure to generate narratives about development is directly proportional to the ambiguity decision makers experience over the development process', because micro-level uncertainties lead to a greater tendency to 'see the scale of uncertainty at the macro-level to be so enormous as to require broad explanatory narratives that can be operationalized into standard approaches with widespread application' (Roe 1991, 288). The resulting 'blueprint development' narratives often continue to promote approaches that bear little relationship to actual conditions in the world.

The population-pressure-on-resources approach has long been a standard blueprint narrative in international development, often made to stand in as an explanation for everything from food insecurity to environmental conflict (Hartmann 2010; Hartmann and Hendrixson 2005). While critical social scientists have critiqued the approach for over four decades, it persists in its ability to offer simple technological solutions to complex development problems – solutions that can sidestep systemic or structural change (Ferguson 1994). At the same time, the approach was expanded in the 1990s by a coalition of development actors, specifically to incorporate feminist health perspectives (Hartmann 1995). The Programme of Action developed at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) outlined a new definition of reproductive health and rights that would lie at the heart of all population and development programs internationally, arguing that reproductive health 'implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so' (United Nations 1995, para. 7.2). In practical terms, the policies stemming from the document focus primarily on supporting women's access to voluntary family planning – contraceptive technologies – as a means of securing access to health, social freedom, bodily integrity and empowerment for women. As a result, SRHR often operates as a catch-all term encompassing women's empowerment, health and justice.

As a technical strategy, however, the focus on contraceptives disables more critical and complex articulations of the relationships between population, development, environment and gender (Richey 2008; Maternowska 2006; Hartmann 1995). This technicalisation works to silence alternative framings, preventing them from achieving success as policy interventions because of their resistance to technoscientific transformation (Halfon 2007). Concurrent with this technical interventionist framework is the ongoing production of knowledges arguing that population growth is an urgent problem contributing to climate change. Far from static, these knowledges are dynamic and flexible, constantly in a state of ongoing development and increasingly disseminated by young policy advocates.

Young people in the lead?

In November 2010, the Universidad del Caribe in Cancun, Mexico hosted the sixth annual Conference of Youth (COY6), the annual conference of young climate change activists convening just prior to the annual COP meetings. COY6 drew over 400 young activists from over 40 countries to discuss, debate and strategise on a range of climate change-related issues from energy development to forestry policy, tar sands and the fate of the Kyoto Protocol. On day 2 of COY6, I sat in a small, stuffy room, waiting for the start of the 'Youth support sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for a just and sustainable world' workshop. Upon entering the room, visitors were greeted with a 'resources table' crammed with postcards, brochures, buttons and condoms with eye-catching slogans and simple catch phrases advertising 'Sex, Rights and Climate Change', and insisting that 'The Fate of the World is in Your Hands . . . and In Your Pants'[5]. Fewer people were in attendance than the previous day's events; however, what the workshop lacked in participants was balanced by the rapt attention and inquisitive energy of those who were there – most of whom had never attended a meeting focused on SRHR as a component of their climate change activism. (Research informants would later note that, unlike other forms of activism in which extensive policy knowledge or technical expertise is important, a lack of knowledge or experience with the issue area is actually viewed as an asset in population-climate advocacy, as it affords advocates opportunities to recruit new supporters and advocate for policy change in the simplest terms possible).

Julie[6] took the floor to open the session, rattling off a spate of statistics about sea-level rise, annual average tons of emissions generated on national and per capita scales, and the lack of political will, particularly in the USA, to ratify an international climate treaty. After identifying the myriad challenges of climate change activism, she described SRHR as a beacon of hope in an otherwise grim landscape: 'It's

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not all bad', she said. 'There's actually a shockingly simple solution, available right now, it's cheap, and it actually promotes social justice too.' Pausing for emphasis, she looked around the room:

> It's family planning. It's something we know works, we know women want it, and now there's a recent study that tells us how it's an important part of mitigating climate change! It just makes sense. Women's rights, saving the environment, and social justice, and it's not expensive. And it's what women already want. How could you not get on board with that?

If Julie's comments seemed reductive in nature, the reductions were familiar. Collapsing the boundaries between vaguely defined terms and categories like social justice, women's health and women's empowerment is common in population-climate organising. At a youth summit in early 2010, a training facilitator told a crowd of assembled youth that improving access to contraceptives globally works simultaneously toward bringing global South communities out of poverty, improving women's capacity for decision-making and leadership, and slowing the pace of GHGs. However, when challenged about the causal relationships she suggested, the facilitator retreated to a vague emphasis on social justice. 'We're talking about giving women what they want', she claimed. 'Ultimately, that's the most important thing here. And giving women what they want is a win–win for climate change.'

Any form of activist organising requires a certain amount of energy to rally support and convince constituents that success is possible. With large-scale, complex issues like population trends and climate change, the scale and scope of problems can seem overwhelming and unsolvable when communicated in global terms. Thus, certain reductions in scale, from global and complex to local and simple, become necessary components of advocacy efforts so that potential supporters perceive target problems and proposed solutions as within reach. Enacting a strategic calculus balancing complexity and simplification thus becomes a core component of winning support, particularly for an issue as vulnerable to controversy and conflict as population (Sasser 2012).

A core component of new population-climate advocacy involves defining key terms – commonly used development acronyms and paradigms – by translating them into language that is both broadly accessible and easily transformed into sound bites and policy messages. This is an act of simplification and of rallying support. Because of the historically freighted nature of population debates, the core language of new advocacy messages is invariably upbeat, positive and pro-woman. During the COY workshop, Julie and other workshop presenters used a standard list of phrases, including 'SRHR', 'women's empowerment', 'international family planning policy', 'reproductive justice' and 'youth leadership' interchangeably with contraceptive access for women and increased funding of international family planning programs. Julie explained these connections thus: 'Universal access to contraceptives empowers women and youth to make their own decisions about childbearing, which promotes justice', she argued. 'It's not about coercion or population control. It's about empowering women to make their own decisions, which is what social justice is all about, and empowering women is also a really important way that we can help slow climate change. It's a clear win–win. We just need to get the message out there, and get more young people on board to help spread the word. Who doesn't want to fight for justice?'

Julie's words highlight what is at the core of what I refer to as technicalisation: a set of strategic translations, or reductions, shifting such complex issues as gender inequality and lack of reproductive health services into the narrow category of technology access. According to her message, women's reproductive decisionmaking is hindered only by a lack of the technologies (contraceptives) necessary to do so; women everywhere will inevitably choose to have fewer, likely one to two, children if enabled to do so by contraceptive access; and ultimately, providing such access universally will simultaneously slow global population growth and the GHGs emitted by resource users who are universally the same. Elsewhere, the messages included women's education and income generation as effects of contraceptive use. This logic relies on the technology of contraceptives to enact shifts that would otherwise involve social change, political struggle and changes in legal status for women and girls – ideas that never came up in the SRHR workshop. What did arise, again and again, was the opportunity that climate change offered as a means of both mobilising youth activist energy toward other global causes, a primary one being women's SRHR.

Young people engaged in population-climate advocacy draw heavily on the language of youth leadership as a means of establishing their activism as innovative, youth centred and distant from the freighted, ugly politics associated with histories of population control. Undergirding the focus of the workshop was a youth policy statement[7], developed, circulated and approved by the workshop organisers in the room and their NGO partners. The document stated the activists' position thus: 'Collectively, we as young people have a critical role to play in adapting to climate change, helping mitigate climate change, holding our governments accountable to set targets in Cancun, and shaping a just and sustainable world.'

In this context, a just world is achievable through the concept of women's empowerment, including empowering women to access contraceptives. Notably, geographic location of advocates and those they advocate for remains undefined, relegated to

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vague notions of 'global' contraceptive users. The document further states that 'an effective approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation must support young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), as doing so is essential for adaptation while reducing the impact of future climate change'. Citing the estimated 215 million women around the world with an unmet need for family planning (Singh *et al.* 2009), the statement argues that meeting this need would provide significant benefits in carbon reductions, thus helping to mitigate climate change and providing solutions to problems of both environment and gender equity. The statement also draws selectively on O'Neill's (2010) demography and emissions study, quoting the study's projected figures on future emissions reductions attributable to a scenario of universal contraceptive access.

While the question and answer session immediately after the presentations can provide participants with opportunities to challenge and debate presenters, this did not happen at the COY workshop. Those in attendance asked basic questions about contraceptive access, fertility rates and women's SRHR broadly, reflecting a general lack of knowledge of these subjects among a climate change-focused audience. Rather, the challenges and debates took place among SRHR advocates themselves, outside of the workshop. As I walked down a dusty road with an American youth activist later in the week, she raised doubts about the role of population interventions as a climate strategy. 'Look, I don't believe that population growth in places like Africa is causing climate change', she said. 'But we still need to get young people organised to care about family planning. Because, no matter what, African women need better access to SRHR. And young people care about climate change, it's an easier sell.' I asked what she thought about addressing population growth in the USA. 'Well, but when it comes to the U.S., it's not so much about population growth, is it? It's about actual resource consumption, regardless of how many people there are, right?' I countered by asking how the perspective she'd laid out was reflective of social justice. 'I think meeting women's needs is social justice. Poor women in developing countries don't have anyone to advocate for them. This work gives us a chance to do that, and people care, even if it's not perfect.'

The conversation raised a number of key questions. Which were the actual social and political commitments that underlay the youth activists' work? Were their motivations to engage in climate advocacy simply strategic, invoking familiar paradigmatic development discourses on population growth in order to usher in what they viewed as important policy changes for family planning? Part of the answer lay in the pragmatics of leveraging attention to climate change as an opening for increased attention to SRHR. At the same time, the youth advocacy work demonstrated key strategies and priorities of larger development institutions they were associated with, and ultimately led by.

Building leaders: NGOs behind the scenes

Development NGOs, including population and family planning organisations and environmental organisations, have increasingly worked together to create multi-sector intervention approaches to population and climate change relying heavily on the importance of contraceptive access (Sasser 2009). The Center for Biological Diversity has been the most creative in this regard, distributing 'endangered species condoms' emblazoned with humorous slogans linking condom use with species conservation and climate change mitigation[8]. American college campuses have proved to be popular distribution sites, with students quickly depleting supplies at Earth Day and Valentine's Day events[9]. Working more closely with youth advocates, the Sierra Club's Global Population program conducts extensive outreach and training work, with an emphasis on equipping young people to build their own environmental advocacy campaigns, lobby Congress members, and build strong coalitions among other activist youth.

Today, NGOs concerned with population and climate change are rolling out programs designed to train youth cadres as the next wave of population advocates. This is not entirely new; Population Connection (formerly Zero Population Growth) pioneered this method in the 1970s while mobilising college students across the USA to design population advocacy strategies. However, unlike the 1970s, population is not a popular issue on the national environmental agenda, at least not in the mainstream. As a result, to build support for population and family planning work, NGOs must organise young would-be advocates through indirect channels, building on their existing interest in climate change to make a case for population as an important climate change issue.

A former manager at the Sierra Club explained the focus thus:

> Climate change is the main point of entry for most youth. Children are hearing a broad, general sense of urgency around environmental issues. Younger kids are more aware of climate change; it is talked about in schools, they're seeing images related to Hurricane Katrina, they've heard of Al Gore and seen his movie. It is being taught in school; they've seen landmark events in their own lifetimes . . . Within the Sierra Club, youth activists self define not as environmental activists, but as climate change activists, and are interested in a right-based approach. So we have to meet them where they are, and build on their priority issue areas.

The power and promise of youth as a political force was often emphasised by NGO employees I spoke to.

Following the American presidential election in 2008, organisations working at the nexus of population and environment began to strategise in earnest on how to bring more young activists into population advocacy, particularly on the issue of climate change. One approach that was agreed on was to emphasise the voices of *existing* youth leaders, who would be encouraged to see connections, not barriers, in cross-sector development work. It is important to note that these youth are not dupes, however; their selection as leaders was based on prior identification as vocal supporters of climate change or SRHR on their campuses, and more importantly, their desire to expand their existing advocacy efforts through more direct policy efforts. Youth apply for one of several NGO-led policy advocacy training events each year, selective events where they are trained in crafting strategic policy messages and communicating those messages to key constituencies.

The importance of youth leadership was demonstrated in a speech by a young activist at an NGO-led national youth lobbying summit in Washington, DC in 2010. Drawing on upbeat organising language, she positioned young activists at the forefront of SRHR, climate change and other global development issues, with an emphasis on the power of the individual. Outlining three conditions of contemporary youth organising, she emphasised young people's ability to draw on unique organising resources and skills to build issue advocacy and leadership, noting that, first, social media and communications technologies are reducing national and regional borders, rendering young people today the first truly global generation; second, youth were one of the most important political constituencies in the 2008 American presidential election; and third, race and gender are not divisive issues that they were in previous generations.

She stated:

> We represent over half of the global population. We're leaders of today as well as tomorrow. Older people are playing catch up, whereas we 'get' the modern world. We're replacing signs and protests with individual action. We're part of the action; we're the 'me' generation. Local actions and local solutions to local problems are best. We understand the world and are well versed in issues. The older generations need us; they need to ask for our input. The global movement is turning international development on its head, including those most affected by it in the planning process. This is our civil rights movement.

Understanding NGOs' desire to mobilise youth in this way requires an understanding of the shifting trajectory of family planning in international development funding. US government funding for international contraceptive access has waned significantly over the past two decades. A report produced by five former directors of the Population and Reproductive Health Program at the United States Agency for International Development tracked the Agency's funding for international family planning between 1995 and 2008, finding that it took a sharp nosedive immediately after the paradigm-changing International Conference on Population and Development, never regaining its former prominence in US foreign aid budgets. Describing an 'enormous pent-up and growing unmet need for family planning', the report cites 'mistaken' perceptions of declining global population growth, diversion of funding to HIV/AIDS programs, and a general lack of awareness of the role of family planning in economic development as reasons from funding declines. As of fiscal year 2011, US government allocations for international family planning were at US$615 million, a slight decrease from the previous year's high of US$648.5 million (Guttmacher Institute 2011).

Although this number represents a slight increase over previous years' funding, it reflects an ongoing trend in which funding for international family planning has stagnated while funds for other health development sectors, such as HIV/AIDS, have dramatically increased. Donors from several private philanthropic organisations have stepped into the gap, leveraging privately raised funds for NGOs to initiate population-climate advocacy programs, including those that focus on youth leadership as a primary strategy (Sasser 2012). While such strategic donor financing has a long history in the population sector (Connelly 2008; Sharpless 1998), youth advocacy today demonstrates that paradigmatic population narratives can be made new again when transformed into strategic cross-sector messages. At the nexus of youth advocacy, development paradigms and urgency toward reviving the flagging family planning sector, emphasising climate change offers advocates a way out of the historical limitations of population control debates, while offering a renewed sense of hope for the technological promise of contraceptives for women.

Conclusion

As this article demonstrates, widespread attention to climate change offers opportunities to renew broader attention to family planning through new discourses, actors and scientific perspectives. While young SRHR advocates are increasingly becoming involved in multi-sector policy advocacy spanning the climate change and family planning sectors, the technicalisation that results from this pairing of issues reduces women's SRHR to interventions that are much narrower than those hinted at in broader messages and advocacy efforts. This narrowing is driven in part by an emphasis on new scientific knowledge, suggesting that global reductions in human numbers will have a direct impact on reducing future GHGs. At the same time, the presence of conflicting scientific evidence on the issue demonstrates that contemporary advocacy is actually the result of strategically selecting

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data that fit with longstanding narratives assuming a universal human resource consumer – an approach that lends itself easily to contraceptive-focused interventions.

Technicalisation involves a set of slippages and translations moving from complexity and contradiction to the clarity of simple solutions. This study of youth population advocacy demonstrates that the process of simplification involved in advocating for international family planning policies as a climate change solution belies complex prioritising and strategising work that takes place behind the scenes. While the effects of these projects continue to unfold in contradictory ways, exploring their underpinnings and the processes involved in technicalisation is a productive place to imagine new linkages between knowledge, politics and gendered debates about the political nature of climate change solutions.

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Notes

1 COY meetings are always held in the days just prior to the International Conference of Parties (COP) climate change conference. Most youth in attendance also attend COP meetings and activities.

2 A list of descriptions of all COY6 workshops is available at http://youthclimate.org/projects-and-actions/2010-2/coy6/coy-6-workshops/ (accessed 31 July 2012).

3 The study was that of O'Neill *et al.* (2010), discussed at length later in this article. The policy document, titled 'COP policy statement – global youth support sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for a just and sustainable world', can be found at http://advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/cop16_english.pdf (accessed 31 July 2012).

4 An example of this approach is demonstrated by the Pop Offsets Project, which claims to enable 'individuals and organizations to offset their carbon footprint by funding the unmet need for family planning': www.popoffsets.com/what_we_do.php (accessed 20 June 2012). According to the project, offsets are achieved through making contributions to family planning programs, which ensures the reduction of future emissions through prevented births.

5 These slogans were developed for youth population campaigns by US-based development NGOs – Advocates for Youth and The Sierra Club, respectively.

6 All names in this article are pseudonyms.

7 The 'COP 16 Policy Statement – Global youth support sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for a just and sustainable world', accessible at http://advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/cop16_english.pdf (accessed 20 June 2012). The statement was developed by an American youth activist and brought to COY and COP meetings as a policy platform piece, and to garner additional support from young climate activists from around the world.

8 Campaign slogans include: 'Don't go bare . . . panthers are rare', 'In the sack? Save the leatherback', and 'Safe intercourse saves the dwarf seahorse': www.endangeredspeciescondoms.com/ (accessed 31 July 2012). Center for Biological Diversity is the only environmental organisation that openly advocates intervening in US population growth, citing the Murtaugh (2009) study to argue that population growth, economic growth, and resource consumption rates make the USA the most important place for contraceptives to make a difference in GHGs.

9 Personal communication with program staff.

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