



Background paper for the speakers

ECOPOP-Initiative

1. Introduction

This year's MMS Symposium takes place in the hot phase of the debate around the so called ECOPOP-Initiative. Swiss citizens will vote about this initiative on 30th November 2014. It has two postulations: On the one hand the initiative intends to annually limit the migration in Switzerland to an average of 0.2%, and on the other hand it demands that 10% of the Swiss development cooperation budget will be earmarked for voluntary family planning. This background paper wants to inform you on that initiative as the second postulation of it touches our symposium's theme. The board of the Network Medicus Mundi Switzerland as well as many member organisations clearly reject this initiative.

2. What is the ECOPOP-Initiative?

The initiative combines two issues, which seem to have no relationship between each other. They claim that the reduction of migration will reduce ecological problems within Switzerland. In proclaiming so the initiative fuels xenophobia in Switzerland. Secondly it expects the Swiss Government to invest more in voluntary family planning in developing countries.

To understand the link between the two issues, you have to know, that the people behind this initiative are rooted in the overpopulation debate of the seventies. In their view overpopulation is the problem for all the ecological problems – an “uncontrolled” population development in developing countries would threaten our planet – neglecting that the ecological problems are mainly caused by the rich countries. At the same time overpopulation causes for ECOPOP global migration.

3. Our point of view

The Network Medicus Mundi Switzerland is campaigning together with member organisations against this neo-colonial initiative. MMS is pointing out three arguments against the initiative:

1. Voluntary family planning is one of the most cost-effective investments to reduce unwanted pregnancy, as well as maternal and newborn death. But it only makes sense, if it is embedded as part of the sexual and reproductive health interventions. The strong focus only on access to Family Planning would weaken the integrated approach to improve access to sexual and reproductive health services along the continuum of care.
2. Swiss development cooperation would be forced by the constitution to focus on the goal of reducing overpopulation globally. This would discredit Swiss development cooperation as a whole.
3. There are several causes for lacking social and economic growth. MMS and its members advocate for more justice, for a human-rights based development, good governance and investments in health systems that are accessible for all.