



for a
sustainable
future



Population Matters Magazine

Issue 21 August 2012

An uncertain future

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About Population Matters

Population Matters campaigns for environmentally sustainable populations in the UK and the world. We advocate gender equality, poverty alleviation, access to reproductive health services, balanced migration and smaller families.

We are a charity whose activities comprise education, research and policy promotion. We are funded entirely by our members and by donations and grants. We receive no funding from official or commercial bodies.

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Magazine

Members are welcome to contribute articles, reviews and letters for consideration. Contributions should be around 700 words, interesting and related to population concern; They may be edited for length and the editor's decision is final. Copy deadlines are the end of June and the end of December.

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Situation review

Simon Ross, Chief Executive, Population Matters



“If one looks at the big international conferences, where consensus is all, one would imagine that population remains a “mad taboo”.

The Planet Under Pressure conference in London in March described itself as ‘A major international conference focusing on solutions to the global sustainability challenge.’ However, this gathering of three thousand global change scientists failed to focus on population, relegating it to a couple of minor sessions towards the end of the conference and mentioning it only in passing in the final statement. The Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, which disappointed many, again mentioned population more or less in passing, as something to take into consideration but seemingly not as something one could or should do anything about.

Yet, elsewhere, it is being treated increasingly seriously. The Royal Society People and Planet report and the IAP Global Network of Science Academies both came out strongly to say that addressing both

population and consumption is critical to our future. Leading organizations in the field are increasingly being emboldened to say that ‘population dynamics’, which includes ageing, migration and urbanization as well as overall numbers, must be factored into sustainable development. The London Summit on Family Planning, hosted by the UK government and the Gates Foundation, is the latest example of a growing international impetus on family planning, after a decade of relative neglect.

Many, particularly in some developmental and environmental charities, would like to ignore population altogether. However, realists recognise that numbers have not stopped growing and that the trend has truly alarming implications not many years hence. They also recognise that no silver bullets with widespread support have emerged in either technological or social development to solve all our problems. The global economic crisis has sucked attention and resources from big initiatives. However, the impact of climate change, as with many major changes, is increasing slowly but relentlessly. The Millennium Development Goals were successful in achieving real progress in some areas, though family planning was not one of them. We need now to ensure that their planned replacement, the Sustainable Development Goals, incorporate the drivers of falling birth rates and gives them sufficient funding and support to get the world on track for the bottom of the range of UN population projections.

Population Matters has been active around all of these events. It would be stretching things to say that we are influencing policymakers. However, by being a strong voice for population concern, we are providing the arguments and support to enable policymakers to resist the more extreme arguments of those who think that population does not matter.



View from the Summit

Roger Martin

1. **Let me share your Vision;**
Let me see your dreams –
Fleeing for a moment
Tiresome, real-world schemes.
2. **Draw for me an idyll;**
Let's play "Let's pretend".
Rio de Janeiro
Is where all rainbows end.
3. **Conjure up Nirvana;**
Show me Shangri-La –
Golden peaks and temples,
Glittering afar.
4. **Rights for All to water,**
Food and jobs and health.
All can thrive for ever
If we share the wealth.
5. **Stay in Nature's limits,**
But grow economies.
'Impossibles' are merely
Accountants' sophistries.
6. **So don't shout "Population!";**
Don't bellow "Growth must
end!";

Please spare me bio-physics
– It's only "Let's pretend".

Rio, 22 June 2012

Earth Summit: Big Problems, Small Minds

Roger Martin, Chair, Population Matters

As you will have read, the much-heralded Rio+20 Earth Summit was a damp squib, in depressing contrast to the other conference I also attended in Rio, of the International Society for Ecological Economics (ISEE) where Jane O'Sullivan of Sustainable Population Australia (SPA) and I both gave papers. The Development lobby heavily outnumbered the Sustainability lobby, and the rubric 'Green Growth' means little more than conventional economic growth with some optional greenwash; the private sector representatives were quite happy with it - a bad sign. Even a paragraph in the 'Rio Declaration' on "the need for broader measures of progress to complement GDP" was deleted, though the UK announced it would introduce a system of "GDP+" by 2020. The Holy See were outrageously prominent in trying to suppress anything hinting at women's reproductive rights; and the Americans were far more subordinate to their corporate sector and religious right than 20 years ago.

Quite the worst amendment forced on the text was the deletion of language advancing 'Planetary Boundaries', towards and beyond which we plunge enthusiastically on. The most substantive surviving reference to population is in paragraph 144: "We commit to systematically consider population trends and projections in our national, rural and urban development strategies and policies. Through forward-looking planning, we can seize the opportunities and address the challenges associated with demographic change including migration." So the sub-text remains "Accept population growth as a given to be accommodated, not a variable to be tackled; and emphasise the illusory 'opportunities". Overall, it's a huge backslide from Rio 20 years ago, when Secretary-General Maurice Strong could say bluntly: "Either we reduce our population voluntarily, or nature will do it for us brutally".

I had to conclude that Governments basically don't care if the planet collapses under us in 20 years time. Their concerns are to get re-elected by providing the short-term growth that unsustainable growth capitalism has persuaded us to demand. This raises the hugely challenging question of the tension between sustainability and democracy. The only solution is to persuade electorates to demand more sustainability and less consumption - easier said than done, when politics and the media are unanimously desperate for 'growth'!

The government delegates were largely cloistered from the rest of us, so most of my time was spent attending relevant side events, sitting near the front, trying to get in a point or question, and talking briefly to the VIP speakers at the end, with luck exchanging cards for follow-up. I thus got in a population plug one-to-one with, *inter alia*, the Directors of the WTO, UNEP, World Food Programme and IPPF, Nick Clegg and Caroline Spelman, the Prime Minister of Bhutan (the sanest and most inspirational man in Rio, with a population policy and 12 economic recommendations to the world's Governments), the M/D of Unilever, Gro Harlem Brundtland, Mary Robinson, Baroness Amos, Jeffrey Sachs, the UK Chief Scientist, Sir Bob Watson, the Heads of the Global Fund for Women, UN Foundation and Oxfam, the Danish Aid Minister, and the head of the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia(!), among many others.

The International bodies and NGOs in the side events were - often to excess - the opposite of the jaded and defensive Government negotiators, simply listing the miracles needed to achieve a prosperous and sustainable world of limitless population, by hugely increasing the supply of everything, and asserting this as a 'human right' - thus implying a duty on others to provide it!. Apart from us and our US and Australian allies with whom we liaised closely, I heard no-one else saying plainly that it was desirable to work on reducing future demand as well, though some others hinted at it in oblique language (population 'dynamics' when they mean 'growth' etc.). The UNFPA and Population Action International, however, produced some much more strongly worded publications than hitherto. I met the author of, and commend, the UNFPA's 'Population Matters for Sustainable Development', and Population Action International's 'Why Population Matters to Water Resources/Food Security/Poverty Reduction', especially the first.

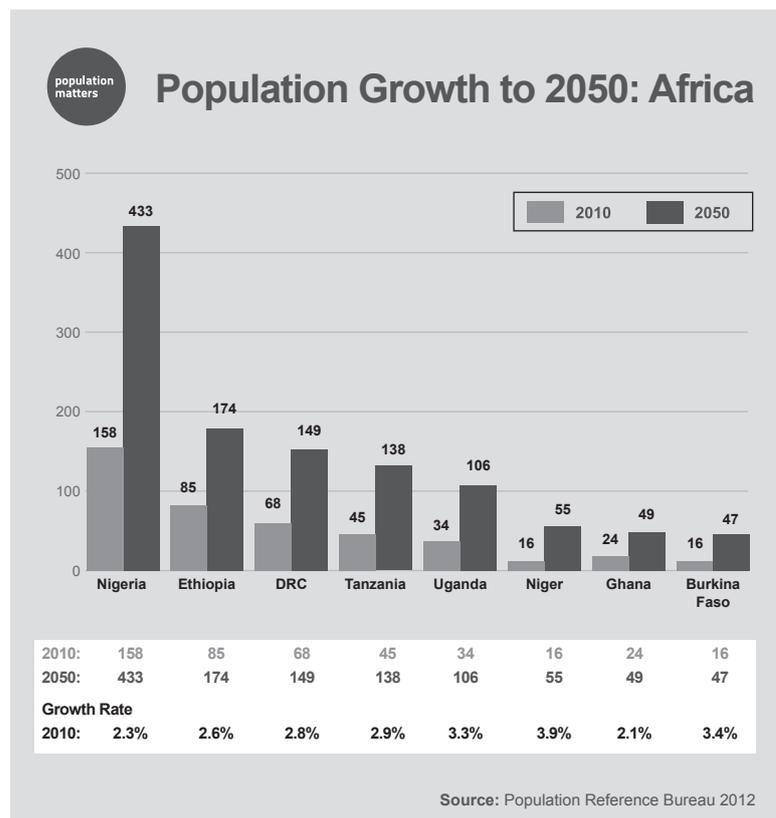
I wrote the little poem attached shortly after a particularly hallucinatory but star-studded FAO session on their 'Zero Hunger Challenge' - abolishing hunger by 2050. The President of Niger spoke movingly about the 'scandal' of his hungry children; Nick Clegg agreed it was indeed a scandal; and the issue of hunger was discussed for an hour without a single reference to population - not even of Niger, with the highest population growth rate in the world, already unable to feed half its 16 million people, and projected to have 55 million in the next 38 years! I have copied the attached chart round those present, and pointed out that Niger's most crying need is for help to reduce its fertility fast enough to avert disaster. No-one seriously believes that Niger can feed 55 million people in 2050, so the question as always comes back to how, not whether, growth will end - sooner by fewer births, or later by more deaths. A similar joint UNEP/UNDP session on their otherwise admirable 'Development/Environment Initiative' also failed to mention population.

On the plus side: there is some quite good language in paras 145, 146 and 241 on gender equality etc, including: "We emphasize the need for the provision of universal access to reproductive health, including family planning and sexual health and the integration of reproductive health in national strategies and programmes" (para 145); there was a lot of intelligent criticism of GDP at both conferences; there was some real progress agreed on the Oceans; and Mathis Wackernagel of the Global Footprint Network (GFN) received both the prestigious 'Blue Planet' Award and the ISEE's 'Kenneth Boulding Award'. This enhances the status of our Overshoot Index, which is a simple extrapolation from GFN data.

My own personal high point was getting in a question to Caroline Spelman's panel on 'Economics of Sustainable Development'. After a Bangladeshi professor gave a dismissive reply about GDP growth rate being much greater than population growth rate, Jeffrey Sachs (Columbia University professor and recent Reith Lecturer) gave us a ringing endorsement with an impassioned affirmation of the need to address population growth. He was very informed on the subject, emphasised that almost all the growth would be in countries that are unable to support their current population and were heading for catastrophe, said it was disastrous that the focus of family planning had been limited to women's rights and population taken off the agenda, and it wasn't at all about imposing on poor people - they desperately wanted contraception. (We may be able to retrieve a recording of the session).

All in all, a fascinating but deeply depressing experience. I shall never know if I had any actual effect on anyone or anything. As with most of my international work, I have to say I do not think it would have been worth charging the costs to our own limited charitable funds. The professionals vastly out-number and out-gun us volunteers, and tend to have their own agendas; while the carbon cost to the planet of the whole jamboree must have been large (and no-one else is even going to contribute to PopOffsets!)

The action now moves to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the successors to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which end in 2015. I hope to muster some allies to get population growth and women's rights recognised as 'cross-cutting' themes, relevant to the whole agenda. So we battle on.



Pollyannas of Population Growth: Fooled by the Culture Gap

Anne H. Ehrlich, associate director and policy coordinator of the Center for Conservation Biology at Stanford University, and Paul R. Ehrlich, Bing Professor of Population Studies in the department of Biological Sciences at Stanford University, president of Stanford's Center for Conservation Biology and Population Matters patron.

The following are extracts from a longer article, published on the Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere website (<http://mahb.stanford.edu/>)

[There is clearly an organised climate change denial lobby.] But there is another equally serious assault on science and humanity. That is systematic claiming that population growth is either beneficial or at least not seriously harmful.

There is a major difference between the two assaults, however, in that those who think the population can and should grow forever are not united by greed or even ideology, but by a lack of understanding of basic science. Roman Catholic bishops fight contraception (and backup abortion) to protect their ideological base – to do otherwise would be to lose more power by admitting the Protestants were right all along. In so doing, their main damage has been to cripple U.S. government efforts to spread family planning overseas by misleading and intimidating politicians of other persuasions. Their actions have tragically condemned millions of women to injury and death in unsafe abortions and helped to perpetuate poverty in developing nations. If the bishops understood human sexuality and the unrecognized perfect storm of problems civilization now faces, one would hope that if they were moral men they would quickly see through the Church's antique and immoral notions and desert from the trenches of its war on women. It is noteworthy that Catholic laypeople generally use contraception and abortion at about the same level as non-Catholics in the same nations. Indeed, mainly Catholic nations in Europe are among those with some of the lowest birth rates on the planet. Moreover, many of those unfazed by the population explosion are not Catholic, including multitudes of businessmen and economists who imagine that

ever-increasing numbers of people are necessary for economic prosperity (yes, greed is one element along with doctrine!).

To a large extent, refusal to recognize that continued population growth is a serious threat to the future of civilization can be blamed on the failure of educational systems to bridge key parts of the culture gap, the growing chasm between what we each know as individuals and all of the knowledge society possesses corporately. That gap leaves many well-educated people ignorant of today's crucial environmental problems.

Misunderstanding of how demographic and environmental connections interact is common even among people who are interested in population problems. For instance, environmental reporter Fred Pearce is convinced that overconsumption is a much larger contributor to environmental deterioration than overpopulation. This is roughly like being convinced that the length of a rectangle is a much larger contributor to its area than its width.

This entire situation is made worse by "non-linearities" in the population-consumption growth picture. Being clever, human beings use the easiest, most accessible resources first. This means that the richest farmland was ploughed first and the richest ores mined first. Now each additional person must be fed from more marginal land and use metals won from poorer ores. Thus, on average, each person added to the population disproportionately increases the destruction of environmental systems. The non-linearities involved in resource extraction were dramatically underlined by the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon blowout in the Gulf of Mexico. The first commercial oil well in the United States was drilled in Pennsylvania in 1859. It started at the ground

surface and struck oil at 69.5 feet. The Deepwater Horizon drill rig, 150 years later, started a well for BP in the Macondo concession in the Gulf of Mexico. Drilling began under almost a mile of water and had penetrated almost three miles below the sea floor when the explosion occurred. The difference between the Pennsylvania and Gulf wells is just one sign of the diminishing returns that Joseph Tainter suggested is one of the main harbingers of societal collapse. Such diminishing returns are now evident everywhere, affecting virtually all the resources civilization needs to persist.

In addition, as the population grows, efforts to keep people supplied with consumer goods release more toxic compounds into the global environment. The toxification of Earth may be an even more dangerous trend than climate disruption or the extinction crisis, but it is increasingly clear that the scientific community has not even begun to address it properly.

People also should understand that population size is a major factor in the deterioration of the human epidemiological environment. The larger the human population (and the more hungry and thus immune-compromised people there are), the greater the chance of vast epidemics. And as people struggle for resources in a deteriorating environment, the odds of a nuclear resource war increase, although even a

“small” one between India and Pakistan would likely end civilization.

The history of claims that technological innovation will save us is instructive. When “The Population Bomb” (P.R.Ehrlich 1971) was published, the global population was 3.5 billion people, and we were assured that technological innovation would allow society to give rich, fulfilling lives to 5 billion or more people. They would be fed by algae grown on sewage, whales herded in atolls, leaf protein, or the production from nuclear agro-industrial complexes. That, of course, never happened. The population now exceeds 7 billion, and the number of hungry and malnourished people today is roughly equivalent to Earth’s entire human population when we were born in the 1930s. David Brooks.... could be a poster boy for the culture gap. He recently published a column on “the fertility implosion”, joining a number of clueless European politicians, demographers, and pundits worried about a trend that could lead in a salutary population direction. They fear the ageing of the population that inevitably occurs when population growth ends. But all one really needs to appreciate the silliness of fearing an aging population is realizing that the only way to avoid it is to keep the population growing forever.

Some thoughts on the accusation that quantitative concern about population must be coercive

John Guillebaud, Emeritus Professor of Family Planning and Reproductive Health, UCL and Population Matters patron

“Family planning could bring more benefits to more people at less cost than any other single technology now available to the human race”

(James Grant, UNICEF Annual Report 1992).

As well as being plain wrong, compulsion in reproductive health has always been counter-productive, outside of China. Instead, we should be adequately resourcing the voluntary things – primarily, ensuring that any sexually active woman on the planet who wants a modern contraceptive method, has easy access to it: all barriers removed. These barriers are usually caused by men (husbands, religious leaders, political leaders...) and reinforced by incorrect information, including widely circulated myths about the risks of contraception.

More than four decades ago, Ehrlich and Holdren showed that there are only three factors or drivers of human environmental impact, namely the ‘green-ness’ or otherwise of technology - on average, per person on the planet; resource consumption and pollution, again per person, and the number of persons or population.

Since there are only those three factors, is it not foolhardy to continue to neglect any one of them as has largely been the case with regard to voluntary contraception within a rights-based framework, i.e. should we not make family planning and other reproductive health services freely available and fully accessible to everyone - and empower and encourage them to use it? This is a win-win solution to population increase, since it is meeting unmet need at a human level – whereas there is decidedly no unmet need to reduce consumption (that being something every poor person very reasonably aspires to, indeed up to a sustainable level should be actively helped towards - and every rich person wants more of the same....)

Despite the well-known cultural and religious endorsement for large families in many low-resource settings, very few women want the maximum biologically possible number of children (>8); teenage and late-order births are very frequently regretted; and the UN with the Guttmacher Institute estimate in 2012 that about 35% of the 800 women dying avoidably in childbirth each day - or 104,000 women a year, an outrageous statistic - did not want the pregnancy that killed them. You cannot die of a pregnancy you don't have (having avoided it through having had fully accessible family planning). Between a third and a half of all conceptions on earth are not planned, an estimated 80 million per year, resulting in 30 million unplanned births, the tragedy of over 40 million abortions and 10 million miscarriages. These facts make family planning a moral imperative. In 2012 about 222 million women who do not use modern contraceptive methods say they want no more children. (See www.guttmacher.org/media/nr/2012/06/19).

We in Population Matters strongly reject coercive contraception; but can it not be argued rather convincingly that, on the contrary, many women are having coerced pregnancies, and even dying, as a result of the absence of access to the choice to limit their fertility that women of the rich North take for granted and even see as a human right? That's quite simply unfair! Indeed, given the high levels of consumption and pollution here in the richer global North, one can turn the above accusation about poor people on its head and argue even more strongly for the crucial importance of family planning in countries such as the UK. As Andrew Ferguson of Population Matters has calculated, one less birth means one less person to produce in their rich lifetime, on average, over 3 million miles of driving's worth of carbon dioxide!

Everyone must retain the human right to choose the size of their family. Yet evidence from the “success-story” territories where average family sizes have come down from high levels to replacement or lower –

a long list, from Thailand to Taiwan, Province of China, from Cuba to Colombia, from Korea to Kerala - shows how people in such varied settings can come, through education and the media (see www.populationmedia.org), to achieve full understanding of the “cons” of large families and the “pros” of small ones. Then provided always that the FP methods are accessible, without anyone “telling” them, they do choose the size of their family: but it’s a small one!

Ironically, the problem stems from medical success: poor people are often blamed for having more children than in the past, but that is a myth. It’s really that fewer children are dying. The sad and obviously completely unintended consequence of better public health (as initiated in 1854 by Dr. John Snow) and antibiotics etc., hence reduced mortality especially of children, has been the creation of an ongoing imbalance between births and deaths, currently 80 million per year. How much worse this imbalance would be were it not for the good news that the average family size (shorthand for total fertility rate (TFR)) of the world has, surprisingly, halved since 1950 when it was over 5 and now (2011) stands at about 2.5 (where 2.1 or 2.2 would be replacement level). There is persistent bad news, however, in that the 58 highest fertility countries, 39 of them in sub-Saharan Africa, have far higher TFRs and are projected to triple their numbers to 4200 million by 2100 (UN data). In a majority of countries there is also population momentum - created by the “bulge” of young people born already in the

high fertility years. In Niger and Uganda, one in two of the population is currently a child, under age 15, and this population bulge along with current rates of childbearing is projected to result in their present populations tripling sooner - by 2050. www.prb.org/pdf11/2011population-data-sheet_eng.pdf

Rich women use family planning more frequently than poor women, but surveys show that on average the poor have almost three times the unmet need for family planning. It is not, as is the perceived wisdom of sociologists, that the poor actively set about having large families, to help in the fields or look after elders as they age. They may and generally do accept them as they come along for those “social security” reasons. But what is really going on is that they are simply having reasonably regular sex, as with opportunity most people do, and a large family results because to have a small family requires something to be present that isn’t: namely contraception. Which parents with 3 children had sex only 3 times? Large families are the default state of humanity; they are what will always happen when there are powerful barriers to family planning options and the correct information women need and deserve. Sex at normal frequency plus absent family planning = more offspring. It’s hardly rocket science.

Professor Guillebaud will be speaking at the 2012 Population Matters AGM and Conference.

Lament over Unplanned Pregnancy

Dr. Richard Grossman, author of the US based blog,
www.population-matters.org

“The prevention of unwanted pregnancy is more important than ever for the well-being of the family.”

Antero Myhrman, Born Unwanted.

One of my strongest memories from medical school was a delivery I assisted with. This was the mother's fifth child and a quick birth. I proudly held up the new born boy to show him to his mother. She turned her head away and cried. I don't remember the names of the mother or baby, who would be about 44 years old now. How his life has gone is only conjecture, but the likelihood is that his path has not been an easy one.

We generally assume that all adults are cut out to be parents, but that is not true. Forced parenthood can have unhappy consequences for the adults, and especially for the children. The biggest and best analysis of children born unwanted was done in Czechoslovakia at a time when women had limited access to legal abortion. An American psychologist, Dr. Henry David, collaborated with Czech counterparts. Czech women had two chances to request an abortion in the 1960s. The first chance was at a local clinic. If the woman was turned down, she could apply again at a regional level, the last resort for a legal abortion. Unfortunately, the many advantages of adoption were not considered in this study.

One of the Czech psychologists had a list of women who had been twice denied for the same pregnancy. Because of the excellent record keeping of that country, the children born to these women with unwanted pregnancies could be followed for many years. They were carefully matched to children who were desired—same age, same socioeconomic class, same school etc. All the families lived in Prague, the country's capital.

These individuals, both those unwanted before birth and the “normal” controls, were examined and tested at age 9, in adolescence, and again in their early 20s. The investigators also looked at records, interviewed parents and spoke with teachers. The two groups ended up significantly different despite growing up in very similar circumstances. Compared to the people who resulted from pregnancies that were planned (or at least accepted), those born unwanted did not fare so well in life.

Specifically, the babies who had been unwanted were not breastfed as long, and did not achieve as well in school even though their intelligence tests were as good as the more desired children. They were more likely to be less social and more disruptive and hyperactive, and were more likely to have criminal records. When asked as adolescents, the children who had been unwanted believed their mothers showed less maternal interest than did the control group.

The young adults in their 20s were asked how they felt about their lives. Again there was a significant difference, with the people who were unplanned being less satisfied with their lives, with their love relationships, with their own mental health and with their jobs. It is interesting that their sexual debut was at an earlier age and they have had more sexual partners than control people. Thus, these people were more likely to beget another generation of unwanted pregnancies.

There are exceptions to the general rule. Dr. David's research found three groups of women who requested abortions but were denied. Some had temporary motivation for wanting to abort, such as financial reasons. These women usually accepted the pregnancy and both mother and child did well. For other women the pregnancy resulted from a poor relationship, and they did not do so well with childrearing. The third group of women apparently realized from the beginning that they would not be good parents, and the study, unfortunately, bore this out. Both the women and their children did not fare well. The Czech study was of women who were denied legal abortion. Those who were allowed to have abortion must have had even more compelling reasons to not parent. If they had been forced to bear their unwanted kids, presumably these children would have had even more severe problems.

What does this mean? A person resulting from an unplanned, unwanted pregnancy starts off life with a handicap, like the baby I delivered in medical school. This can have consequences for society, too. There is a controversial theory, popularized in the book, *Freakonomics*, by Steven Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner, that the downturn in serious crime in the USA noted in the early 1990s was due to the decrease in unwanted pregnancies after the legalization of abortion in 1973. An unwanted pregnancy can be devastating. Sometimes things work out well, but delivering and raising an unwanted baby may be traumatic for the parent(s), and scar the child.

Membership survey 2012

Simon Ross, Chief Executive, Population Matters

Thanks to all who took part in our survey earlier this year. Thanks, particularly, for the very many suggestions we received. Summary findings are set out below, together with our responses. Please note that, while we had several hundred replies, one can never guarantee that those who responded are typical of the membership as a whole.

The typical member is over 50, has a degree and is not religious. There is a low proportion of ethnic minorities. Members are somewhat more likely to be male than female and political opinions were spread across the spectrum.

While these are not bad things to be, one would always wish for improved representativeness and we have taken a number of steps to address this. We are particularly planning activities focused on youth and welcome opportunities to engage with these or other under-represented groups.

Four out of five respondents had promoted the population issue, two thirds had made a donation, while one in six had volunteered for some activity.

We are appreciative of the support and involvement of our members, which we feel is one of our strengths. We will be building on this next year through the development of local groups and regular promotion of volunteering opportunities.

In terms of AGM location, London was the first choice of half of respondents and acceptable to two thirds, far above any other location.

It would be pleasant in some ways to take the AGM on a tour of seaside resorts, but for most people's convenience, I think we are likely to be in London for the next few years.

Respondents were generally satisfied with our publications, but less so with our level of activity, though there were few who were actually dissatisfied.

There are two stories here. One is that we have spent a lot of time over the last couple of years in re-launching ourselves and strengthening our governance. This was important; now that it has been done, we can reorient ourselves more fully to activity in direct support of our goals. The other story is that a lot of what we have done has not been fully communicated. We shall make a greater effort, particularly through the monthly newsletter, to keep everyone updated on our activities.

All of our goals were supported by at least three quarters of respondents, with the exception of our support for later retirement, where only half were in favour, while a quarter were opposed.

It is reassuring to hear that our goals have members' support. We certainly understand concerns over later retirement, which of course is already being implemented to some degree. I would say that this is not something we campaign on and is only one possible policy response to increasing longevity and any reduction in the birth rate and/ or net migration.

At least three quarters of respondents also agreed with each of our links between population and specific other topics such as congestion, planning pressure, etc.

Again, it is good to hear that respondents were happy to endorse each of the links we make between population and other topical issues.

Respondents felt our top three priorities should be raising public awareness of the issue, lobbying government and lobbying environmental groups, followed by engaging with schools/ youth, lobbying civil society and research.

We do agree that raising public awareness and lobbying government are absolutely key priorities. We already spend much of our time on these activities. Of course, all of these activities are important to some degree, and often reinforce each other. It is important to realize that both the media and government have many other issues that they focus on, even if they were well-disposed to population, which is not always the case. Not everything we do has immediate results. Nevertheless, both areas will receive greater focus over the next year.

Note: If anyone has any specific questions about the research findings, please do just ask.

Population Matters Strategy 2012-13

Simon Ross, Chief Executive, Population Matters

The board has discussed and agreed the strategy for next year. It is summarized below, though detailed plans remain confidential at present. Members are welcome to write in with any comments and the strategy will be presented at the AGM in October.

Overall

Our public opinion research shows that most people are concerned with population growth and its impact and agree that people should limit their family size. However, research also indicated that there was less support for many of the policies we promote. We believe that the issue's profile is rising, that we are seen as the voice of population in the UK by those who are aware of us, and that articulated opposition is limited. Nevertheless, population remains a taboo subject for many, as is evident in meetings with some environmental groups and MPs. Our overall strategy is to argue that immediate and impactful actions are available and thus to turn the widespread passive concern into more active support for our policy proposals. Policy research will be commissioned and used in campaigning to demonstrate the importance and urgency of the issue and to explore policy solutions. Education, particularly in schools, will be used to promote behavioural change. Advocacy and communications will address relevant current issues and focus on specific policy solutions. One focus will be to explain and popularise what can be complex issues.

Specific areas

- **Advocacy** - UK Politicians - Secure the support of MPs for a stable UK population and for population stabilization abroad. Firstly, to address politicians on areas of concern to them and to urge them to call for population stabilization as part of achieving their goals and, secondly, to urge support for measures leading to population stabilization at home and abroad.
- **Civil society**, including e-NGOs and development NGOs, faith-based, professional, women's and youth organisations - Secure the support of NGOs for a stable UK population and population stabilization abroad. Gain exposure to NGOs and seek to influence their membership and look into producing joint statements.
- **Europe** - Increase our lobbying at European level. Co-operate with European partners and seek official accreditation.
- **Global** - Increase our lobbying at international level. Co-operate with international partners and seek official accreditation.
- **Education** - Influence secondary education on population and sustainability. Develop appropriate materials and engage with educationalists.
- **Research** - Publish research to aid understanding of population and sustainability. Engage with academic institutions and think tanks.
- **Communications** – Raise our profile and that of the issue. Use targeted approaches to key media.
- **Finance** - Manage our finances in a prudent manner. Review our approach at least annually.
- **Fundraising** - Increase our income to support our activity. Increase our membership and approach charitable trusts with specific projects.
- **Administration** and membership services - Maintain our current standard of customer service. Enhance our processes and consider outsourcing some communications activities.
- **Human resources and membership activity and communication** - Increase volunteer numbers and improve volunteer organization.
- **Governance and strategy** – Continue to improve our conformance to best practice in terms of governance, including compliance and risk. Use an annual review to assess conformance and use the support of industry bodies to highlight other opportunities for improvement.

People and Planet: it's time for a new relationship

Norman Pasley

When I was a lad, population used to appear in atlases in tables of the largest cities and the most populous countries in the world. The millions of people in London, Tokyo and Cairo were interesting statistics. As I recall, there was nothing written about the resources that sustained these millions, or of their impact on the natural world.

Today we are all becoming aware of the impact of people on the planet. In the last 60 years our numbers have increased to 7 billion – almost a threefold increase, an unprecedented event in the history of the world. Today most of us are consuming much more than we did then. Our impact on the planet is now much greater in terms of demand for food, water, energy and consumer goods, together with the related damage we are causing to land, air and oceans.

In April this year the Royal Society published a report called *People and the Planet*. The President of the Royal Society, Sir Paul Nurse, in his forward to the report, acknowledges that “rapid and widespread changes in the world’s human population, coupled with unprecedented consumption, present profound challenges to human health and wellbeing, and the natural environment”.

In my view, the report correctly links people with consumption and the natural environment. Many people, and environmental organisations, still believe consumption is the only important reason for damage to the natural world, and the impact of rising population is small enough to be ignored. I would argue that if the population had stabilised at 2.5 billion 60 years ago, for example, and those 2.5 billion had present day consumption habits, we would now be consuming about one third of what we do today and having one third the impact on the natural world.

The report lists three pressing challenges: the world’s 1.3 billion poorest people need to be raised out of poverty; unsustainable consumption must be urgently reduced in the developed and emerging economies; and global population growth needs to be slowed and stabilised. These challenges are complicated and related. They are all about people: people who have too little; people who consume too much; and the excessive number of people. People’s actions are responsible for the ongoing damage to the natural world. Consumption is man-made. Like population,

consumption needs to be stabilised and reduced. What are the likely consequences of unrestrained population and consumption growth? Demand will grow for items such as wheat, rice, meat, fish, oil, gas and coal, and thousands of other things. Scarcity will drive up prices. More people will be unable to afford them, leading to more poverty, social inequality, and, perhaps, social unrest. In summary: the present relative calm could be followed by a spiral of suffering, and a political nightmare of national and international proportions.

If we accept the conclusions of this report, and we have any thought for future generations and the world they will inherit, I would argue we need to re-think everything we do. All consumption which causes major damage to life on land, and in the oceans, and to the quality of the air must be rapidly reduced. We need to weaken markets for fossil fuels and fish, for example, by increasing the value of natural capital, developing sustainable alternatives, and ceasing to make and consume non-essentials.

The science in this report needs to be turned into practical action. However hard that may seem, and however many other issues may seem more important and get the daily headlines, we must put the wellbeing of the planet in the centre of our thinking. This task is now the shared responsibility of 7 billion people, and the sooner we take effective actions the better. While I’ve no doubt environmental organisations, such as Population Matters, which have passion and independence, will play a large part in driving this, a heavy duty must fall on governments. Delegates at international conferences must be resolute and achieve targets.

A lad born in 2050 will be one of between 8 and 11 billion people on the planet at that time, according to UN projections. By prudent action on population and consumption in the coming decades, can we bequeath him a stable planet where population and consumption no longer degrade the natural fabric of the only home he has?

The human costs of population growth

Mark O'Connor, poet and environmentalist



Section 4 from the chapter “Boundless Plains to Share?”

Why no population policy?” in:
Environmental Policy Failure:
the Australian Story pp. 146-159,

K. J. Walker and Kate Crowley, eds.,
Tilde University Press, Melbourne, 2012

‘I’d like to see a situation where you can get a seat on a bus.’

Tony Burke, Australia’s first Minister for Sustainable
Population, on Sky News, 4 July 2010.

Environmental scientists might define a sustainable human population as one that (a) can supply its own wants in perpetuity from its own natural resources, and (b) no longer brings ongoing damage to natural environments. Politicians have much looser, even trivial, definitions, and an extremely short-term focus. (‘Sustainable’ may simply mean what they can get away with till the next election.) For them a major issue is the infrastructure debate.

This debate requires us to distinguish two sets of population problems. One set is caused by a country’s absolute population size. (Most problems for other species are of this kind.) The other set is caused by the rate of population growth. Thus Jane O’Sullivan suggests that the extra infrastructure cost for each person added to the population is probably around US\$200,000; though William Bourke has argued that it may be closer to A\$500,000 (O’Sullivan 2010, Bourke 2010). Population growth rates of more than 2% a year require more spending on infrastructure (notably trains, buses, bridges, roads, drains, sewers, water mains, electricity grids, and hospitals) than governments dare ask from the taxpayer (O’Sullivan 2009). Hence infrastructure and services are overstretched, and budgets (including for conservation) are often slashed.

As well, population growth adds to many urban problems: pollution, congestion, commuting times, high house prices (Burnley, Fagan & Murphy 1997, p. 89) and the resulting need to work long hours to pay off crippling mortgages, expensive and inconvenient rebuilding of cities, and loss of parklands. It also adds to the future dilemma of how to supply Australians with oil, electricity, water and food, while at the same time trying to reduce emissions and preserve environments (Foran & Poldy 2002a & 2002b; Carr 2010, p. 31).

Such problems tend to compound. Lardelli (2009) comments:

“As Melbourne’s population grows it sends out pipelines like invasive roots to suck water out of what used to be distant river systems — but those river systems, such as the Goulburn River, are already being used to grow the food that Melbourne needs . . . Population growth lies at the core of all questions of sustainability. It is growth of the human population and the increasing resources that it requires that drives the destruction of habitats, the increasing levels of pollution (especially CO₂), and the accelerating depletion of finite resources. It is impossible to stop exacerbating these problems if we do not stop population growth.”

Australia is one of the world’s most urbanized countries, with 90% of the population living on 2% of the land. Hence the effects of population growth on human beings are felt intensely in its cities. For instance, in 2006 the Sydney Morning Herald reported that Sydney’s councils had abruptly been instructed to accommodate an extra 1.1

million people within 25 years (SMH 2006). The councils protested in vain that this would destroy their plans for maintaining Sydney's once-impressive environmental amenities. Yet large increases in Australia's and Sydney's projected population since 2006 mean that even these quotas will prove inadequate. Developers often claim that the result will be 'vibrancy' as opposed to 'stagnation'; but many residents see, or fear, a continually densifying and degrading cityscape.

There are also psychological costs. The Labor MP Kelvin Thomson claims:

"Our cities are too large. They dwarf people. The sheer scale of them is overwhelming for some, who lose the plot and fall victim to mental illness or drug and alcohol abuse. And for the rest of us the madding crowd swells every year, giving us that little bit less room... In my home city of Melbourne, a lot of people of goodwill have supported high rise as preferable to urban sprawl. What they don't realize is that it isn't halting any urban sprawl at all. Suburbs continue to march out onto the horizon. Property developers are having their cake and eating it, too (Thomson 2009a, p. 8106)."

There is no central register of such 'diffuse costs' to our quality of life, and no easy way of summing up 'intangibles' (Productivity Commission 2010). Hence environmentalists, focused on wild nature, have sometimes done too little to protect established suburbs from destructive redevelopment. Indeed they often help complicit state governments by leading debate away from population growth ('not the real issue') towards speculation on whether densification (which may destroy the human scale and amenities of a city) or decentralization (pushing people out of the city or to its fringes) is 'the solution'. In practice population growth commonly brings both.

It also greatly increases a city's demands and impact. Denser suburbs may permit better public transport, but the assumption of a strong link between density and effective public transport has been seriously challenged (Mees 2009). Yet at present in practice they bring a multiplication of cars and emissions. In any case, the energy costs of high-rise living, and of re-building existing suburbs piecemeal (with great nuisance to residents) may outweigh any energy savings on transport (Myors 2005; Glazebrook, Rickwood, & Searle, 2007).

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Yet most politicians prefer to believe that technology or densification, or even decentralization, will 'de-link' population from such problems. In December 2010 the Australian Minister for Sustainable Population Tony Burke released an Issues Paper in which he implied large claims for regionalization:

"The key to understanding policy for a sustainable Australia begins with a principle of regional difference. In some communities infrastructure and services have not kept pace with population growth, while in others employers are facing a chronic shortage of skilled labour (Burke, 2010, p. 1)."

Yet we are now in the context of Peak Oil, which may have occurred in 2008, and is likely to bring at least some years of energy shortage before alternative sources can be exploited (Aleklett, 2010; McKibben 2010). There is also an extensive literature about the risk that dense cities may turn into unsustainable 'killing zones' in a world that runs short of energy and hence of food, or the means and will to transport food (Energy Bulletin 2010; Goodchild 2010; McNamara 2010-011). In 2010 the Department of Immigration and Citizenship warned the incoming Gillard government that it expected about 90% of immigrants to continue settling in Australia's major cities, and that its medium-term predictions for immigration exceeded those on which Treasury's 2010 Inter-generational Report was based (Scott 2011). Yet making Australia's main cities bigger or denser is unlikely to make them more sustainable; decentralizing a growing population into regional cities, even if feasible, may overload the infrastructure of those cities; and moving the population to small towns or farms seems implausible.

Mark O'Connor is a co-editor of the Oxford University Press textbook Protected Area Management, author of This Tired Brown Land and co-author of Overloading Australia: How Governments and Media Dither and Deny on Population (with William Lines), and has published more than a dozen other books and received several awards. With Judith Wright he founded Writers for an Ecologically Sustainable Population, and served for a decade as National Vice-President of Sustainable Population Australia. He has taught at James Cook University, University of Aarhus, and the Australian National University, and has been the Australian National University's H C Coombs Fellow, and the Museum of Victoria's Thomas Ramsay Science and Humanities Fellow.

A small South African nature reserve & its challenges

You can follow David and his comments on South African population related matters on Twitter @DavidJohnsonSA

Conservation Manager, Teboho Maliehe, faces many unenviable issues whilst protecting Driftsands Nature Reserve. Encroachment from human settlement is the most obvious. Driftsands is located within one of 34 global biodiversity hotspots, the Cape Floristic Region. A staggering 9,000 plant species are found crammed into this tiny area in the south western extremity of South Africa, 6,000 are found nowhere else on earth. When UNESCO designated parts of the region as a World Heritage Site, it described the area as “one of the richest areas for plants in the world”.

Cape Town is one of the most diverse areas within the floristic region and also the most heavily populated. One vegetation type found exclusively within city limits is False Bay Cape Flats Dune Strandveld. This Strandveld (Afrikaans for “beach scrub”) is endemic to the Cape Flats area of Cape Town and so cannot be conserved elsewhere. Under a quarter of this Strandveld’s original extent remains undeveloped. Driftsands, run by the provincial government conservation body CapeNature, is one of the few protected remnants.

The reserve is surrounded by some of the most densely populated and poorest townships. Whilst the increasing human population is the cause of the reserve’s main threats, it is also a reason to protect it. Driftsands is the only facility in the area providing open space, a library with internet access, an environmental education centre and hiking trail. Its non-indigenous vegetation removal program has created 340 local jobs in an area with overwhelming unemployment.

Many residents near Driftsands are Xhosa, people historically from the largely rural Eastern Cape. One Xhosa custom is an initiation ritual, a sacred rite of passage to mark adulthood. The custom includes a period of seclusion, circumcision, a celebratory feast and much more. There is a local demand for initiation but Teboho explains “in recent years, initiation sites were being located next to roads, railway lines or close to residential areas. This affects the integrity of the practice.” He continues “we have a mandate to grant community access to protected areas for spiritual and cultural activities and initiation is part of that.” After a lengthy community engagement process, CapeNature

opened an initiation facility within the reserve. An agreement has made the community responsible for the facility with CapeNature providing the infrastructure. Teboho concludes that the facility means “people’s dignity is restored”. The reserve therefore has cultural significance to locals as well as botanical interest to conservationists.

Driftsands embraces community involvement, with one project involving propagating plants for wetland rehabilitation creating jobs and providing skills development. CapeNature has also encouraged the establishment of small businesses to undertake non-indigenous vegetation removal.

Nevertheless, with space in the Cape Flats at a premium, the threat to the reserve from swelling informal settlements is substantial. In January 2012, former residents of the depressingly overcrowded neighbouring township of Khayelitsha constructed 200 shacks in the south of the reserve, in one night.

Green Park is an incongruously named informal settlement inside the west of the reserve. Here, through successful local engagement, CapeNature has persuaded the community to prevent the building of further structures. The plan is for Green Park to be de-proclaimed from the reserve, the municipality would then gain responsibility and provide utilities and other facilities. If Green Park remains its current size, the plan will proceed more quickly. This pragmatic approach has meant encroachment in this section of the reserve ceased long ago. The situation is less promising elsewhere, Teboho warns “our challenge is to ensure the reserve does not get taken over by informal settlements.” Other informal settlements in the reserve are growing.

Los Angeles is an informal settlement located within a wetland component of the reserve. Homes are made from corrugated iron and wood and lack electricity or private toilets. Los Angeles residents are living in damp wetland conditions known to increase the likelihood of contracting TB. Standing behind one of the structures on a higher dune in Los Angeles provides two contrasting views; endangered and beautiful Strandveld one way and the informal settlement stagnating in a wetland the

other. No one aspires to live in such conditions, but when there is nowhere else to go what is the alternative?

A dirt road bisects the reserve. The lack of fencing means vehicles use the road to dump piles of rubble, tyres and other industrial waste. This is not dumping by the local community but rather companies from outside the area wanting to save money on landfill fees. The road is also used by locals to walk to work opportunities on the other side of the reserve. If CapeNature were to close the road, it could deprive these people of their access to employment. However, without fencing it's impossible to prevent the waste dumping and continued introduction of livestock, which browse indigenous flora and spread seeds of invasive grass via dung. Driftsands has no funding for such fencing. Therefore the reserve remains threatened by settlement encroachment, waste dumping, cattle grazing, fires started by herders to

encourage grass growth and the non-indigenous grass growth restricting the indigenous Strandveld plants.

The population of the Cape Flats is increasing, which will surely exacerbate the challenges faced by Driftsands. The importance to the local community of the reserve highlights many reasons to prioritise protection in addition to biodiversity value. CapeNature are undertaking an admirable job and achieving successes with their community involvement work. If funding for the fencing were provided, the Strandveld could be protected more easily and it would be harder for people to access and build homes in wetlands unsuitable for human habitation. Any long term solution requires urgent resolution of the national housing crisis. This is not imminently likely and it is not the remit of a small threatened nature reserve with a highly restricted budget. The future will be tough.

Review

“Ecological Ethics (second edition) by Patrick Curry” Polity Press 2011

Roger Martin,
Chair, Population Matters

Our Advisory Council member Patrick Curry has produced a fine, thoughtful, book, which I can commend to all who take sustainability seriously. Most of our discourse on population and the environment tends to be rational, scientific, anthropocentric and utilitarian; yet people generally are more concerned with questions of right and wrong; and our critics are of course shrill in their moral disapproval of our concerns. This book enables us to answer them on many levels; and more importantly, it has major implications for the way we choose to live, and the awareness with which we do so.

Patrick's style is extremely readable, jargon-free and down to earth. Population gets a good chapter, Malthus a beautifully concise three pages. But of course the book ranges much more widely, with very clear chapter and section headings, so one can treat the Contents pages like a menu. I found the chapters on 'light-green', 'mid-green', and 'dark-green' ethics personally challenging, as I realised how instrumental, shallow and pale green my mental habits have become - mere 'lifeboat ethics'. Unlike many of us, Patrick does not shy away from 'ecocentric spirituality' and green Buddhism; but is robustly practical in extracting the ethical element from the way we tackle all the main current environmental problems, such as climate change, geo-engineering or limits to growth.

I particularly liked his sharp analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the 'New Gods of the Market' - carbon-trading and ecosystem services, both of which I have promoted for years. And chapter headings like 'Ethics and Grub' (a quote from Brecht) help to anchor the book in everyday life. In short, it's a stimulating, challenging and enlightening read

Letters

Madmen sought

Sally and Malcolm Ross
(no relation)

I became a member of your organisation, received the Magazine Issue 19, read it - and despaired. On page after page there are phrases like "we really have to...think hard about our sheer numbers", "hence campaigns should focus on allowing people to make their own decisions rather than be told what to think" and "many of the proposals he (Geoffrey Harper in his book 'Democracy or Survival') makes would be unacceptable in a modern developed society".

Doesn't anybody get it! Unrelenting population growth, on which military conflicts, AIDS, enforced low birth targets and natural and man made disasters have had no impact, is bringing us to the abyss. In a world in which governments of neighbouring countries prevaricate over economic, financial and religious differences, what hope is there of achieving the international unanimity that would be required to offer any prospect of man resolving the calamity he is creating?

Victor Gordon's derisively greeted but logical suggestions for stemming the tide, which would be dismissed as laughable or simply mad by the majority of people, would, even if implemented, do no more than scratch the surface of the problem.

So you'll love this suggestion. The only way to save us from ourselves, and all the species that our actions are making helpless victims, is for a group of madmen/messiahs to come up with a means of indiscriminately sterilising a single generation of humankind worldwide. It wouldn't be worldwide, of course. Here and there pockets of the population would escape the net, survive and reproduce.

Daft? It may not seem so in the coming scramble for the last of the oil, water, food and habitable space. Me, I'm just thankful to be old enough to expect not to witness the coming catastrophes, nor the fury and contempt of my one year old grandson and his contemporaries as they demand, "Why didn't you do something while you still could?"

Choosing between evils

Clive Evans

As the lesser of two evils, is it not far less cruel to stop babies being born, in countries which are unable to sustain and feed them, than allowing them to die, in agony, from starvation?

I do not mean abortion, or leaving girl babies to die, as happens in some countries. Despite the valiant efforts of Save the Children funds and the dedicated work of doctors and relief agencies, we are only scratching the surface of this terrible problem, for example, in Ethiopia, where the population grows massively each year. Realistically, we cannot cope unless these poor people are coerced into having sterilisation. Historically, women are always expected to bear the burden of birth control. It is the men who have to be controlled, with vasectomies, regardless of their race or religion, however politically incorrect. Catholics and Moslems are obviously the greatest challenge.

I believe the aims of Population Matters are sound, but not urgent enough and sadly, probably far too late! I also feel the original name Population Control should remain. (Editor: We have never been called this). Education and responsible birth control are fine in theory. But it is naive and dangerous for Population Matters to state 'without coercion'. Without international coercion nothing will happen and the world will exhaust all its resources. There will be: No food, water will run dry and inevitably, wars, disease and disaster will follow - as night follows day.

However much more food can be produced using GM techniques, there is a finite amount of nutrition we can provide for our violently burgeoning world population.

There is a slim chance that if we can forcibly lower the birth rate internationally, in the extremely near future, we may - just - save our planet from extinction, before it is handed over to the ants. I anticipate this view will be damned as alarmist and Nazi eugenics. I expect howls of rage. Some people of my generation even say 'I won't be around to worry about it!' But, however difficult, and some would say impossible to achieve, I believe it is the only solution. Unless all our World Leaders can be frightened and galvanized into action, we've had it. We are - not to mince words - -----!! (Editor: expletive deleted)

Editor's response. *I am sure that many share the frustrations expressed in these letters. We are all conscious of the environmental, humanitarian and sustainability issues humanity faces, both now and in the future. We are also conscious of the limited response to them, of which the Rio+20 Conference outcome was another example. However, I would ask the writers of these letters whether what they propose is really practical, necessary or desirable.*

Practical? *Politically, there is no support for such an approach by a single government or organization whereas global support would be required.*

Necessary? *We cannot of course be certain what changes there will be to future birth rates, consumption patterns and technological development, or whether these will be sufficient to avert the catastrophic outcomes predicted. However, the birth rate is falling in most countries and is already sub-replacement in many. The political will to improve family planning provision has resumed, after a decade-long lull. We have a long way to go and are not complacent, but things are moving and birth rates can change quickly where the political will to implement voluntary programmes is there.*

Desirable? *Even if the measures suggested in these letters were practical and necessary, the level of coercion required would imply a widespread state of desperation and a society with very different values from our own.*

The danger with speculation regarding such approaches is that it distracts us from what we really need to do now: to keep plugging away with the message that smaller families are better for all, and accelerate the trend of falling birth rates that already exists.

Local groups

Population Matters local groups campaign locally on population issues. They staff stalls at fetes and in shopping areas, leaflet door to door, provide educational material to schools and libraries, give talks to schools, colleges and interest groups, engage with the local press and radio, and lobby their local authorities and political representatives. Areas with existing or nascent groups include Scotland, Beds/Herts, Brighton, Cambridge, Colchester/ Ipswich, Cumbria, Guildford, Hampshire, High Wycombe, West London, Oxford and Worcester. If you would like to be put in touch with one of these groups, or ask about setting up one in your area, let us know.

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- 08 The green gains from smaller families
- 09 Population, environment, migration
- 10 Ethical implications of population growth

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