

POPULATION MATTERS

Issue 35 Autumn 2019

“Our generations are the first to really understand the impact we are having on nature. We’re also the last who can do anything about it.”

Bella Lack, Population Matters
Conference, April 2019

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About Population Matters

Population Matters is a UK-based charity working globally to achieve our vision of humanity co-existing in harmony with nature and prospering on a healthy planet. We drive positive action through fostering choices that will help achieve a sustainable human population and regenerate our environment. We promote positive, practical, ethical solutions – encouraging people to choose smaller families and inspiring people to consume sustainably – to enable everyone to enjoy a decent quality of life whilst sustaining the natural ecosystems upon which all life depends. We support human rights, women's empowerment and global justice.

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From the Director

Saving the planet: every choice counts

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“Women with more years of education have fewer and healthier children, and actively manage their reproductive health.” – Paul Hawken, Project Drawdown

The numbers for September’s Climate Strike were impressive: 2,500 events in 163 countries, with an estimated 4 million people taking part – especially considering they were inspired by and grew out of Greta Thunberg’s lone protest ‘Skolstrejk för klimatet’ just over a year ago outside the Swedish Parliament. The majority of younger people taking part demanded world leaders live up to their name and act to curb runaway climate change. But as the UN climate talks concluded, the leading authorities on the science – the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – issued their latest assessment confirming the lack of leadership over decades “Climate change is now irreversible due to the heat uptake of the ocean. We can’t go back whatever we do with our emissions”.

Runaway climate change is with us. Professor Peter Wadhams, the world’s leading expert on Arctic sea ice and a member of PM’s Advisory Council, added his own starker analysis pointing out that the IPCC report underestimated the situation

by failing to mention the ‘very serious threat’ of methane released from the Arctic. Those of you who attended our 2018 Conference, ‘More Feet, More Heat?’ will remember Professor Wadhams’ powerful presentation, including alarming images of methane bubbling up from the thawing seabed permafrost. Runaway, irreversible – but not hopeless.

There are many practical actions world leaders must take and promote, galvanised by the energy of the generation that will be still alive to face the consequences long after today’s leaders are dead. Infrastructure and lifestyle choices that appear obvious and seemingly simple to implement: end the extraction and burning of fossil-fuels; rapidly scale-up renewable energy; get us out of our cars and off airplanes; cut meat consumption (certainly intensive grain-fed systems); transition from using gas to heat our homes and for cooking, as advised by the Climate Change Committee. Hang on, that means removing over 23 million gas boilers in the UK

alone! Just as Peter Wadhams pointed out, the IPCC’s critical omission of methane released from thawing seabed permafrost (methane being thirty times more potent a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide), there is one single life-style choice that both world leaders and individuals (particularly the young people protesting on the streets) could readily promote and adopt to curb ongoing, long-term climate change.

Yet, as [Olivia Nater sets out in her article \(p10\)](#), the ‘most powerful action to save the planet’ empowering people, especially young women, to choose smaller families through access to education and safe modern family planning ‘is the most neglected one’. Simpler, less contentious, and with more immediate benefits to people across the world than the challenging, if ultimately essential, solutions promoted by most climate change campaigners. Yes, the global oil and gas giants must be forced out of hydro-carbons, but they’re not going to do so without a fight and after squeezing every last drop of profit from existing investments. And installing low carbon boilers to 83% of UK homes has been calculated to cost £5,000 a pop for new homes; a staggering £26,000 each for retrofitting existing homes. Such challenging choices are going to have to be made – but why ignore the easy ones?

None of the mainstream environmental groups and few individual climate activists seem aware of or will champion that ‘most powerful action’, despite it being confirmed in research by Project Drawdown as the ‘Number one solution to climate change’. That lifestyle choice and the means to provide it are eloquently described by Project Drawdown’s founder, Paul Hawken: “Educating girls lays a foundation for vibrant lives for girls and women, their families, and their communities. It is also one of the most powerful levers available for avoiding emissions by curbing population growth.”

What’s not to like?



NO MORE SPIX'S MACAW

One of the first acts of our director Robin, when he joined Population Matters (PM) in 2017, was to commission our [Big Foot](#) sculpture. A conversation starter wherever he goes, Big Foot embodies one of PM's guiding principles – human beings are out of balance with the Earth and the natural world. Big Foot demonstrates this clearly: standing on top of a squashed globe, he is picking a goo of squashed animals from his feet. Big Foot is the symbol of our Anthropocene campaign and over the two years since he made his public debut, his relevance and resonance with audiences has become even greater.

The Anthropocene effect which has received the greatest attention is climate change, for understandable reasons. Posing, as our Patron Sir David Attenborough recently said, a threat to the future of our civilisations, climate change demands urgent and radical action. Global heating is now finally high on the agenda thanks to teenage school strikers like Greta Thunberg and the actions of Extinction Rebellion, among many others. PM continues to highlight the importance of addressing the number of climate emitters as part of the solution to climate change, most recently during the [climate action week in September](#) (p9).

The issue of biodiversity loss has received less attention but it too poses the gravest imaginable threat to our futures and requires urgent transformative action. Since the issue was first highlighted by organisations like the World Wildlife Fund (as it then was) and TV programmes, such as those made by Sir David as far back as the sixties, there has been action and some successes, including iconic animals

such as the giant panda and the blue whale. The overall picture however, is one of shocking and accelerating decline. The lion is not yet threatened with extinction, but it is already too late for the northern white rhino, the Chinese river dolphin and Spix's macaw, to name just three of the tens of thousands of species thought to be lost each year. Scientists and conservationists now call the current crisis the Sixth Mass Extinction (the fifth being the dinosaurs). It is thought that the rate of animal extinctions is between 100 and 1,000 times higher than it would be without human influence.

The primary drivers of biodiversity loss are well-recognised:

- Habitat degradation/loss
- Exploitation
- Invasive species and disease
- Pollution
- Climate change

Scientists have repeatedly identified population growth as a driver of almost all of those factors. The most authoritative recent report was the global assessment of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) published in May 2019. The assessment estimated that one million species of animals and plants are currently at risk of extinction. It identified population growth as a key driver of the immediate causes of biodiversity loss alongside other factors such as consumption patterns. In its prescription for vital and urgent action, the IPBES stated "changes to the direct drivers of nature deterioration cannot be achieved without **transformative change that simultaneously addresses the indirect drivers.**" (Emphasis added)

"Just over a century ago, there were more than 200,000 wild lions living in Africa. Today, there are only about 20,000; lions are extinct in 26 African countries and have vanished from over 95 percent of their historic range." Panthera cat conservation organisation

Plenty of other research has supported its position. A 2017 paper published in the prestigious Proceedings of US National Academy of Sciences concluded that “the ultimate drivers of [the] immediate causes of biotic destruction [are] human overpopulation and continued population growth, and overconsumption, especially by the rich.” The paper, co-authored by PM Patron Prof Paul Ehrlich, described the current destruction of species as “biological annihilation”.

Two recent studies established how population is driving biodiversity loss in Africa. Another recent study by the Zoological Society of London concluded that in low and middle income countries increasing affluence (and interestingly, greater involvement of women in government) improves protection of mammal and bird species, but rapid population growth is associated with their decline. The research is important because it shows that economic development – essential for so many in the Global South – does not automatically lead to biodiversity loss. Its message on population is only the most recent reminder of what is obvious to almost everyone.

Population Action

Despite the clear evidence of population’s impact on biodiversity, it is rarely discussed as a solution to the global extinction crisis. That does not mean that no action is taking place. The Population Health Environment model of conservation recognises that improving the lives of human communities can help reduce their dependence on and exploitation of the local natural environment, protecting biodiversity. The provision of family planning services, as well as related action on women’s empowerment, is central to the approach, with successful programmes being implemented in places such as Uganda, Madagascar and Namibia. It is an approach pioneered by, among others, our Patron Dame Jane Goodall, who spoke eloquently about its importance in her video message to our [conference \(p7\)](#).

PM was very pleased to support the timely Thriving Together initiative in July, by our friends at the Margaret Pyke Trust, which gathered more than 150 conservation and family planning organisations to sign up to a statement supporting family planning as a route to protecting biodiversity.

Our [Last Elephant In The Room conference \(p7\)](#) formed a central part of our campaign to raise awareness of the issue and stimulate debate. We promoted the conference to university departments and conservation organisations, as well as the public, and have followed up with a substantial number of them to provide information about the conference and updates on recent research and opportunities.

Convention on Biodiversity

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the key international treaty intended to safeguard biodiversity and obliges its 196 signatories to implement national strategies for protecting biodiversity. In 2010 the Convention set specific targets for 2020 – none of which referred to human population. The Aichi Targets include halving the rate of loss of natural environments and ensuring the extinction of known threatened species is prevented. It is now clear that most of these targets will not be met, another deeply concerning failure by governments to address one of the most fundamental environmental challenges we face.

The CBD is now establishing what it calls the “post-2020 framework” which will be determined in October 2020. PM has obtained recognition as a stakeholder in the process, allowing us to provide three submissions to the consultations taking place. We have lobbied the UK government directly on the issue. In its reply, the government wrote that it “recognise[s] the challenges of population on the environment” and has made small grants to support work on the issue. However, it did not acknowledge our request to address the issue under CBD negotiations, although it has invited us to attend future stakeholder meetings on the CBD process.

Our lobbying has not been limited to the UK and our two African conference speakers, Dr Edu Effiom from Nigeria and Dr Winnie Kiiru from Kenya, both contacted their governments on our behalf in advance of a key African meeting, while we were in touch with the South African government directly. Whilst we received no response, our African colleagues both received feedback from their governments, albeit deeply non-committal. Their involvement shows the importance of overseas partners in advancing our international ambitions. We made further progress in developing those vital relationships when our World Population Day event in Lagos was co-hosted with the Nigerian Conservation Foundation and also focussed on [biodiversity \(p8\)](#).

Negotiations over the Convention on Biodiversity are complex and dominated by governments and long-established players in the conservation field. The influence of a small organisation such as Population Matters is limited but we believe we can generate awareness of the issue that will feed into more successful policies after 2020.

The crisis

It seems almost unbelievable that we are in a human-caused Sixth Mass Extinction and the action to address it is sluggish, inadequate and missing its targets. It is also inexplicable that despite widespread scientific consensus on the role of population, it figures so little in discussions about solutions. We are working hard to put that right. Big Foot must not be a vision of our future, as well as our present. The planet will only continue to support us if we step much more lightly upon it.



© Roland Seire / naturepic.com

Empower to Plan: Jiwsí

Rachel Musk introduces the latest E2P project providing essential relationship and sex education to vulnerable young women in Wales.

It was a shock to many of us when the Family Planning Association (FPA) went into liquidation in May. The needs they had met for nearly 90 years did not suddenly disappear. FPA staff had been working in North Wales for sixteen years with vulnerable young people through Project Jiwsí (sounds like juicy). Determined to continue the fantastic work two of the original FPA Jiwsí staff have set up a social enterprise: Cwmni Addysg Rhyw (Sex Education Company). Empower to Plan is raising funds to help them continue to deliver targeted relationship and sex education (RSE) to young women who access the support group through sexual assault referral centres.

All the young women are between sixteen and twenty-five years old and have not had RSE which met their needs because many professionals are wary of discussing sex with vulnerable survivors of sexual violence. In response to the young women's requests Jiwsí has delivered tailored RSE sessions to them and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. It is empowering them to: reclaim their sexuality, raise their awareness regarding consent, develop their sense of choice, equip them with information on contraception – ultimately enabling them to regain control of their bodies and the decision of if and when they want to have children. It is effective, one health care professional stated:



© Melissa Askew on Unsplash

“Our service users found the Jiwsí sessions extremely helpful. They provided a safe space to discuss topics that were usually difficult to raise and enabled them to reflect on their own relationships. This work is important because a really important part of recovering from sexual violence is being able to have a healthy and happy sex life, yet it is something that is rarely considered”

For young women who have experienced sexual violence an unplanned pregnancy can be devastating. Not only do they have to cope with the impact of sexual violence and the myriad of complicated implications within that, they also have an unplanned situation to respond to, with very clear time constraints increasing the pressure on their decision-making process. It makes a difficult enough situation even more challenging, both for themselves and for their families. In 2017 in Wales, over 3,000 young women under 20 years of age became pregnant, a conception rate of 36.1 per 1,000 women in this age group. This was 4.7 per 1,000 higher than England and 41.4% of these conceptions in Wales led to the young women accessing an abortion. With many young women living in rural areas of the country, choices about what you can do regarding an unplanned pregnancy and the services available to help you are more difficult to access. Most young women who wish to have an abortion in North Wales still have to travel to Liverpool to access one.

“Jiwsí works to enable young women to take active control over their contraception choices. Through training, it equips professionals to support young women who have experienced sexual violence to make positive contraception choices and choose when they want to become a parent; to ensure they don't have that choice taken away.” Mel Gadd, Director of Cwmni Addysg Rhyw

TAKE ACTION!

Population Matters aims to raise £1,400 to enable Jiwsí to deliver a one-day contraceptive and sexual health course to twelve professionals who work with young women and girls who have experienced sexual violence. Each of these twelve professionals work with up to fifty young women a year so the reach and impact is extensive.

The training will focus on exploring the professionals' personal values around contraceptive education and advice, giving clear information on the range of contraception currently available, normalising safer sex, whilst ensuring pleasure and consent are also part of the dialogue. The participants' knowledge base and confidence when communicating with the client group about contraception choices, safer sex and service availability and access will be increased. Jiwsí has experienced that young women want this information, sensitively delivered, to empower them to make positive choices for themselves now and in the future.

You can donate online:

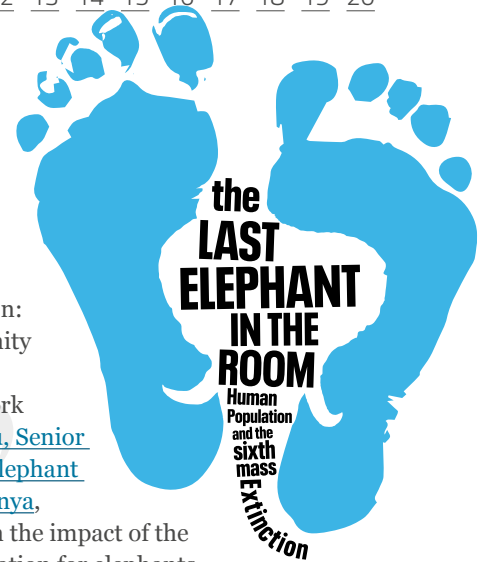
populationmatters.org/empower-to-plan/jiwsí

or send a cheque payable to Population Matters with a note stating you would like it allocated to Jiwsí.

Population Matters News

Population Matters held a landmark public conference in London this April.

© Roxene Anderson



countries having disproportionately large environmental footprints and a corresponding responsibility to take action: “The ‘population’ community and the ‘consumption’ community have got to work together.” [Dr Winnie Kiiru, Senior Technical Adviser at the Elephant Protection Initiative in Kenya](#),

provided grim statistics on the impact of the ivory trade. While the situation for elephants remains grave, she noted significant positive changes in the banning of ivory in many markets. She highlighted other pressures on elephants, including high human population density, which must be addressed.

[The Last Elephant In The Room: Human Population And The Sixth Mass Extinction](#) focussed on the crucial link between population growth and biodiversity loss. With an incredibly knowledgeable international panel of speakers from diverse backgrounds, the day highlighted the interconnectedness of environmental and social issues and the urgent need for the conservation community to address this.

Following an introduction by our President Jonathon Porritt, in which he lamented the fact that too many environmental organisations still ignore human population, over four hundred attendees were treated to a [video message from our Patron Dame Jane Goodall](#). Dame Jane pointed out the importance of women’s empowerment in conservation, mentioning examples of Jane Goodall Institute’s projects in this field in Gombe National Park, Tanzania.

“I so badly wish that I could be with you in person because I think population is one of the most important issues that we face today.” Dame Jane Goodall

[Philip Lymbery, CEO of Compassion in World Farming](#), [kicked off the presentations](#) by talking about the devastating impact of factory farming on wildlife. Pointing out that humanity’s environmental footprint is exacerbated by unsustainable numbers and food systems: for every one billion additional people, 10 billion more farm animals are reared and slaughtered every year. [Dr Edu Effiom, Director of Biodiversity at Nigeria’s Cross River State Forestry Commission \(p18\)](#) presented her research on Nigeria’s rapid population expansion increasing demand for bushmeat and endangering key mammal species, in particular primates. Edu emphasised the need to address both consumption and population in conservation efforts and the importance of educating girls to bring down high fertility rates in the Global South. [Dr Mark Wright, Director of Science at WWF UK](#), [gave a presentation ‘Population Does Matter’](#), with a refreshingly holistic overview of the extinction crisis. He spoke of the need to address our numbers as well as our consumption habits, highlighting the global inequality in consumption of resources and climate change emissions, with people in wealthy

[PM Director Robin Maynard rounded off the presentations](#) with a clear overview of the problem, opportunities and key solutions: education, family planning, women’s empowerment, poverty alleviation and promoting smaller families. He highlighted the current review of the Convention on [Biological Diversity \(p4\)](#) and the need to include that kind of positive action to address population in its provisions. Our youngest conference speaker, [16-year-old environmental activist Bella Lack](#), [shared her important message via video](#). An ambassador for the Born Free Foundation and Jane Goodall Institute, Bella gave an impassioned plea for our planet:

“For my generation, every moment of natural beauty is overshadowed by the grim truth. The grim truth of apathy, of empty commitments, of overconsumption and of decimation... Soon, our population will have to decline...” Bella Lack

Bella’s speech was followed by a panel discussion, chaired by PM Patron Sara Parkin. It was great to see a willingness to confront the facts about overpopulation and overconsumption with all the speakers emphasising the need for holistic approaches and urgent action. Robin concluded the conference by highlighting the progress being made in recognition of the importance of population to biodiversity and the need for future action. He thanked the enthusiastic audience for their engagement. “Earth is our home. Our mission - indeed our survival - depends on altering our trajectory to live in harmony with the still extraordinary diversity of life it supports, as well as our own.”

TAKE ACTION!

Please contact your government to ask for human population to be included in the post-2020 CBD framework.

A sample letter can be found here: populationmatters.org/campaigns/population-and-convention-biodiversity



GOING GLOBAL ON WORLD POPULATION DAY

© Florence Blondel



On World Population Day, July 11th, we held events in three continents.

Thanks to our supporters and allies, we had a very successful day in Lagos, London and New York developing new partnerships, raising awareness of population issues and pushing them up the international agenda. We received more media coverage than ever before with articles published in influential outlets around the world, including in the UK, Uganda, Central America and France. You can see some examples on our [media coverage page](#)

LAGOS, NIGERIA

We were honoured to co-host the World Population Day Forum: Population and Sustainability in Nigeria and Beyond with the [Nigerian Conservation Foundation](#) (NCF). Attended by more than 100 people, the expert panel included representatives from Nigerian environmental groups, the Nigerian Population Commission and the Lagos State government. Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and the seventh largest globally with a population of 200 million people [projected to grow to over 400 million](#) by 2050. Rich in

oil and other resources Nigeria boasts the largest economy on the continent, yet half of its people live on less than \$2 a day; with the highest rate of deforestation in the world its economic growth is neither equitable nor sustainable.

"Worldwide, biodiversity is under unprecedented pressure – we cannot ignore the role of human population growth in endangering our precious, shared natural heritage. Our goal is to raise the profile of this issue nationally, and explore how we can work with partners overseas to find solutions."

Joseph Onoja, Director, Technical Programmes, NCF

NCF's Director-General, Dr Muhtari Aminu-Kano was unequivocal about population growth being a primary driver of biodiversity loss, challenging conservation organisations worldwide to address the issue, "If we don't discuss it, who will?" The willingness of people to discuss the situation was heartening, not least Lagos' Environment Minister who, without notes, demonstrated an in-depth understanding of the issues. He affirmed the 'double-dividend' benefits to people and planet of enabling girls' access to education and family planning, whilst acknowledging the lack of progress in reducing average fertility rates from over six children per woman in the 1970s to the target set in the 1980s of four or fewer by 2000. Average fertility still stands at over five children per woman 40 years on.

TAKE ACTION!

Sign the petition, urge the United Nations to act on population for a reasonable chance of meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

populationmatters.org/urge-un-act-population



© Rupert Rivett

LONDON, UK

In London our message of ‘No sustainable development without sustainable population’ was hard to miss. With the help of members of our London Local Group, our Head of Campaigns and Communications, Alistair Currie, took an eye-catching poster board to the Department of International Development (DfID) highlighting the issue. The colourful image generated attention and discussion among tourists and Londoners enjoying the sunny day in Trafalgar Square.

At DfID, the PM activists also hand-delivered [a letter for minister Rory Stewart](#) who was due to attend the United Nations (UN) meeting on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in New York. The letter commended the UK government for the good work it has accomplished promoting family planning and women’s empowerment internationally and called on it “to engage international colleagues in discussions on population and to work towards international agreement and co-operation that will allow us all to meet the SDG aim of building a better world for people and our planet by 2030.” The Evening Standard, also carried an [interview with Alistair](#).



© Florence Blondel

Condoms Cut Carbon Population Matters at the Mass Climate Lobby

We took to the streets again in September to join the global Climate Strike with around 12,000 people who gathered on the 26th June around Parliament to lobby their MPs to take urgent action on climate change and biodiversity decline. Organised by The Climate Coalition, of which Population Matters is a member, The Time is Now brought together people from across the UK. Adorned in giant condom robes PM staff and supporters attended the mass lobby for climate and the environment in London highlighting the urgent need for smaller families.

We gathered at Trafalgar Square to distribute flyers and raise awareness of the crucial link between environmental issues and human population pressures. Our condom costumes and banners including the slogans ‘Don’t screw with the planet’, ‘Condoms cut carbon’, and ‘Condoms against climate change’ turned heads, made people laugh and most importantly created openings for constructive conversations. Our group proceeded down to Westminster to join the lobby queues where we were encouraged by many cheers and words of support. Several of us joined the lobby queues to meet with our MPs and urge them to include family planning and women’s empowerment in their plans for the environment.

Smaller families are vital for meeting climate targets ([p10](#)). [A 2017 study by the Universities of Lund and British Columbia](#) suggested that having one fewer child may be more than 20 times more effective than any other action individuals can take to reduce their carbon footprint. Governments must listen to the growing number of us raising our voices and realise that ‘the time is now’ to step up action to boost global family planning and gender equality for the benefit of people and planet.



© Maxine Trump

NEW YORK, USA

In New York PM teamed up with [Having Kids](#), staging a peaceful demonstration outside the UN Headquarters. Our goal was to urge UN Secretary-General António Guterres to recommend smaller families as a vital step in attaining the SDGs. Our demonstration followed [a letter](#) endorsed by a number of organisations and sent to Mr Guterres, calling on him to recognise that the protection of future generations depends on a model of family planning that puts children and their future lives at its heart. Our message was reinforced by a head-turning digital-van which reached thousands of New Yorkers with its highly visible ‘Small families for a sustainable planet’ display. Armed with placards and flyers, we positioned ourselves at a busy crosswalk just outside the UN building and engaged people in conversation about the benefits of smaller families and how sustainable development requires a sustainable population. Many passers-by voiced their agreement, and we had positive conversations with several employees of international organisations.

We were delighted with the success of our first-ever ‘global’ World Population Day and would like to thank everyone who made it possible by donating to our winter appeal. We look forward to next year and an ever-expanding international reach. [NB: All travel emissions were offset by corresponding donations to offsetting schemes.]

THE MOST POWERFUL ACTION TO SAVE THE PLANET IS THE MOST NEGLECTED ONE

Population Matters' Digital and Communications Officer **Oliva Nater** explains that as well as being just and morally essential, achieving global gender equality would make an unparalleled contribution to improving lives, reducing emissions and halting the destruction of nature. However, it remains a chronically underfunded and overlooked solution.

Empowered women who have full control over their own bodies and lives have fewer children and make key contributions to environmental sustainability. Project Drawdown, a major international study that ranks climate actions according to their effectiveness, found that the combination of [educating girls and providing access to family planning could reduce atmospheric CO₂ levels by 103 gigatonnes](#) – that's more than the combined potential of onshore and offshore wind turbines, making women's empowerment the most effective solution to climate change.

According to the [UN's latest population projections](#), we are heading towards a population of more than 10 billion people by the end of the century. Based on their calculations, if every other family had just one fewer child than projected, we would see our population peak by 2050 and then decline to 7.3 billion by 2100 – that's fewer people than today.

"Wherever women are given political control of their bodies, where they have the vote, education, appropriate medical facilities and they can read and have rights and so on, the birth rate falls, there's no exceptions to that." PM Patron Sir David Attenborough

Slow Progress Towards Equality

The longer girls spend in education, the fewer children they have, on average ([p20](#)). According to the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, African women with no education have, on average, 5.4 children; women who have completed secondary school have 2.7 and those who have a college education [have 2.2](#). However, [a quarter of all girls](#) do not attend secondary school and [one in every five girls](#) is married, or in union, before turning 18. In the least developed countries, that number increases to 40%, with 12% married before the age of 15. Child marriage is a violation of human rights yet it remains common practice in many parts of the world – to end child marriage by 2030 progress needs to be [at least 12 times faster](#) than it is now.

[More than 214 million women](#) of reproductive age in developing countries who wish to avoid pregnancy are currently unable to because they are not using modern birth control. At Cairo's International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994, world leaders adopted a ground-breaking agreement calling for women's reproductive health and rights to take centre stage in development efforts, but since then the proportion of women using modern contraception has increased by only 6% to 58% today. Still [almost half of all pregnancies](#) are unintended and more than [800 women die every day](#) from causes related to pregnancy or childbirth.



98.7

Wind Turbines



70.53

Reduced Food Waste

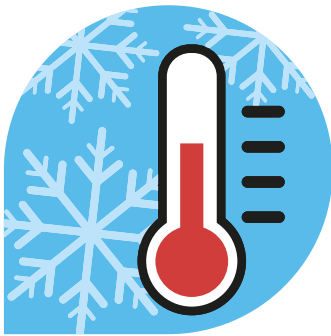
*CO₂-equivalent reduction by 2050 (GT)
Source: Project Drawdown, 2017

“If we invest in girls and women, the world and all of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals will advance forward rapidly as a result.” [Goodwill Ambassador Ashley Judd](#)



102.96*

Women's Empowerment
(FAMILY PLANNING & EDUCATING GIRLS)



89.74

Refrigerant Management



66.11

Plant-rich Diet



© Guille Alvarez on Unsplash

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are a key component of women's empowerment, however, as outlined in the UNFPA's latest [State of the World Population report](#), they “cannot be fully realised in the absence of greater gender equality.” Cultural and religious attitudes which promote sexist norms and behaviours remain a major barrier to improving the uptake of modern family planning. According to a major report published in September, not a single country has yet achieved full gender equality and women continue to be disadvantaged in many other areas including safety from violence and harassment, employment opportunities and access to health care and leadership positions.

The Funding Gap

Thanks to a growing feminist movement, gender inequality has been gaining increasing attention and over the past two years, governments and international institutions have announced more than [\\$1 billion](#) in new commitments to support gender equality globally. This is a welcome development but it pales in comparison to investment in other areas. Last year alone, [foreign development aid from OECD countries totalled \\$153 billion](#) and the world invested [\\$332.1 billion in renewable energy](#). (Let's not talk about global military expenditure.)

Global family planning received a major blow in 2017 in the form of US President Trump's reinstatement and expansion of the [Global Gag Rule \(p13\)](#). A [2019 report](#) by the International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC) states that two years on, the rule implicates almost \$9 billion in US foreign assistance. In a time when investment in family planning and women's rights should be higher than ever before, women around the world are suffering the brunt of regressive populist policies seeking to limit their bodily autonomy, freedoms and reproductive rights.

Gender equality is also one of the UN's 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#) but we are clearly way off track to achieving them by 2030. This goal is unique in that meeting it is key to attaining most of the other goals, so it just does not make sense for it to be one of the most underfunded ones. For example, removing barriers to women's participation in education and the workforce decreases poverty and boosts economic growth. Empowered women have smaller families thereby reducing the strain on global water supplies, curbing climate emissions and protecting biodiversity.

So, what are we waiting for? World leaders, development institutions and environmental organisations must join together in calling for the empowerment of women and girls as a priority path towards a happier, more sustainable world.

TAKE ACTION!

You can help empower women and girls around the world by supporting Population Matters grassroots Empower To Plan projects (p6). Visit our website to see the other projects you can support. populationmatters.org/empower-to-plan



Population growth and climate change are fuelling the water crisis

No Water = No Life

From India to Britain, local water shortages are turning into a global water crisis due to population pressure and climate change. India suffered severe drought this summer caused by a prolonged heatwave and delayed monsoon. In the southern state of Tamil Nadu shrinking lakes and depleted groundwater forced thousands of villagers to abandon their homes because of empty wells. Chennai, India's sixth largest city with a population of 10 million, experienced four of its reservoirs running dry. Residents had to queue at water trucks coming in from other parts of the country; the drought also devastated crops and caused starvation of livestock, further exacerbating the situation. A 2018 report estimated that [600 million people](#) in India are now suffering from serious water shortages. It predicts that 21 major cities, including Chennai and New Delhi, will run out of groundwater completely by 2020. India's population is still growing rapidly and is expected to overtake China as the world's most populous

country within less than a decade. Ever more people will put increasing strain on already overstretched water supplies, with potentially disastrous consequences. Although the Global South is disproportionately affected by water shortage, many high-income countries are also expected to run dry due to climate change and population growth. A report published earlier this year showed that current groundwater extraction in England [exceeds the sustainable level](#) for almost a third of groundwater bodies and up to a fifth of all surface waters. Overexploitation and drought could lead to severe water shortages by mid-century. The UK population is expected to reach 73 million by 2041, with the fastest growth occurring in areas that are already the most water-stressed. All life on Earth depends on clean water – governments must recognise that achieving a sustainable human population size is vital to safeguarding global water supplies.

Is Zero Hunger by 2030 Achievable?

Billions won't have enough fruit and veg by 2050 despite economic growth

One of the UN's [Sustainable Development Goals](#) is to achieve zero hunger by 2030. However, rapid population growth and conflict have stalled progress with the number of people suffering from hunger and malnutrition actually [increasing](#) in recent years. A new [Lancet study](#) analysing the gap between future fruit and vegetable supplies and recommended consumption levels found that even under the most optimistic socioeconomic growth scenarios there won't be enough for everyone by mid-century. Using the World Health Organisation's minimum recommended amount of 400g per person per day, the study found that currently only 81 countries (representing 55% of the global population) have sufficient fruit and vegetable availability for everyone.

The authors looked at three different growth scenarios characterised by different assumptions of economic and population growth. The most optimistic scenario envisions a global population of 8.5 billion people by 2050 and a high per-capita gross domestic product (GDP). The pessimistic scenario has a population approaching 10 billion people with a low per-capita GDP.

This 'pessimistic' scenario is the one closest to the [UN's latest population projections](#) for 2050 of 9.7 billion. Even under the most optimistic situation, which assumes zero food waste, many countries will fail to achieve sufficient fruit and vegetable availability by 2050 with sub-Saharan Africa (the region with the fastest population growth) the

worst affected. In the 'pessimistic' scenario, 3 billion people globally would have insufficient fruit and vegetables with 1.9 billion of them in sub-Saharan Africa. Intensification of agriculture to meet growing demand is one of the main drivers of environmental destruction. Sustainable progress becomes increasingly difficult under continuous population growth.

According to the UN, small decreases in average family size would result in a significantly smaller population by the end of the century ([pio](#)) making healthier, sustainable diets for everyone a lot more achievable.

Trump's Global Gag Rule Consequences

One of Donald Trump's first actions as US president was to reinstate and expand the Mexico City Policy, also known as the Global Gag Rule, effectively withdrawing funding for all overseas institutions that offer services, counselling, referrals or information relating to abortion. The [Crisis in Care](#) report, published by the International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC) reveals the extent of damage caused by Trump's funding cuts. Vulnerable women and girls around the world are being deprived of vital reproductive healthcare, with devastating consequences. The report includes testimonies from IWHC partners in Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, and South Africa which reveal how the policy is causing unnecessary deaths and suffering. It has been repeatedly proven that withdrawing access to medically safe pregnancy termination does not decrease the incidence of abortions but drives the practice underground. Without safe alternatives, desperate women often attempt to terminate their pregnancies using highly risky methods.

"Limiting the rights that women have doesn't make any sense. Such rules are against women's welfare and prevent women from being empowered and making [their own] decisions."

President, IWHC partner organisation, Nepal

Family planning NGOs provide a lot more than abortion services and the funding cuts have had severe implications for other vital services. Many organisations have been forced to end successful family planning programmes and several clinics have had to close altogether. In some areas people can no longer access contraception, youth-friendly services, treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, maternal and antenatal care or trauma services following sexual assault. The report highlights how young people are disproportionately affected due to lack of funds and fear of stigma – many are unable or unwilling to access government-run services. The policy has also damaged organisational networking and knowledge sharing –

organisations which have complied with the Global Gag Rule have felt forced to stop collaborating with former partner organisations that are non-compliant. The report calls for action to permanently end the Global Gag Rule and requests the international community resist this harmful policy and increase funding for, and protection of, sexual and reproductive health and rights.

TAKE ACTION!

REMOVE THE GAG - write to your government.

populationmatters.org/campaigns/protect-global-family-planning-from-us-cuts

UK Population: Growing & Greying

The [latest release](#) by the UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS) confirms that although the UK's population growth rate is not high by international standards, our population is growing larger and older.

- The UK population's growth rate of 0.6% in mid-2018 was lower than any year since 2004.
- In mid-2018 the UK population reached an estimated 66.4 million.
- Long-term international migration to and from the UK has remained stable since the end of 2016 and has continued to be the main driver of the UK's population growth.

A separate release from the ONS reports that there are now almost 600,000 people aged over 90, although that is still less than 1% of the population. While retired people enjoy better health than ever before they are still more likely to require social and health care than any other age group. Whilst most are not employed and do not contribute directly to the economy in that way, many continue to pay taxes in other forms. It has been authoritatively estimated that people over 65 contribute around [£165 billion to the UK economy](#) through informal activity such as child care and volunteering. In fifty years' time it is projected there will be an additional 8.2 million people aged 65 years and over in the UK - a



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population roughly the size of present-day London. This is not unique to the UK - a greater proportion of people are over 65 across the world than ever before. A recent study found that concern about ageing has been exaggerated and identified [many benefits](#) from an ageing population. For example, older people usually consume less each than younger people meaning we are more likely to meet emissions reduction targets with older populations.

SHUTTING US UP: Population Declinism

Should we fear the aged?

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THE SIX SILENCERS

Population Shaming Advocating the stabilisation or reduction of population is evidence of, or motivated by, morally reprehensible characteristics.

Population Scepticism Population growth is no longer a worry as birth rates are levelling off and the global population will stabilise during this century.

Population Fatalism Population may be a problem but there is nothing we can do to fix it.

Population Growth Economies thrive with more people, increasing productivity and consumption, so we need more people, not fewer.

Population Declinism Fertility rates are below 'replacement level' in many countries and we must have higher birth rates to support pensions and health services for the elderly.

Population Decomposing Technology will resolve environmental problems created by billions more people.

Continuing our series considering and deconstructing the 'Six Silencing Discourses' as identified by Professor Diana Coole, University of London, **Alistair Currie** tackles Population Declinism.

While 'population scepticism', as we saw in Robin Maynard's article in this series ([PM Iss 33 p14](#)), regards population growth as both unproblematic and ultimately self-stabilising, Diana Coole identifies 'population declinism' as a related but different response to concern over unsustainable population.

The population sceptic's simplistic faith is that natural 'demographic transition' (the fall in fertility rates that normally accompanies increasing affluence) will deliver a stable, larger, but basically unproblematic, population. In 'declinism', that is eclipsed by the concern that in the most developed countries fertility has actually fallen below replacement levels, while longevity has increased – leading to a society with a greater proportion of old people.

Rather than welcoming the falling birth rate which most developed societies are experiencing, population declinism supplants population scepticism's enthusiasm about growth, and its relaxed attitude to population, with alarmism about the general economic decline of western states relative to more demographically youthful regions. Declinism associates population ageing with negative stereotypes about older individuals, including risk aversion, feebleness and inertia. It is essentially argued that those same characteristics drag down national economic and political prospects.

Importantly, Diana Coole points out, rather than shunning state interference in the private choices of individuals, population declinism favours intervention to influence private choices. Declinists advocate

arresting and reversing falling birth rates through policies offering incentives and assistance to couples, such as tax breaks and childcare facilities, thereby encouraging them to have more children.

While the dangers of population growth have been low on the public agenda in recent times, population declinism has attracted a great deal of attention. Principally it has been catapulted into public consciousness through concerns around the looming ‘pensions crisis’ and the viability of supporting an increasingly large retired population whose care, it is argued, will become an unsustainable burden on a dwindling working population.

Perhaps nowhere is this trend, and the anxiety associated with it, more visible than in Japan. In September this year the Japanese Health Ministry announced that [nearly 70,000 of its citizens were over 100 years old compared to just 153 when records first began in the mid 1960s](#). While Japan’s mortality rate has plummeted, so too has the birth rate, [falling from near replacement level in the 1960s to around 1.4 births per woman today](#). Japan’s population peaked at round 120 million in the last decade, before beginning to decline. The impact of an ageing population on economic growth (the blinkered preoccupation of the modern politician), has led prime minister Shinzō Abe to describe this demographic trend as a “[national crisis](#)” prompting policies designed to encourage more births. This, however, in a nation with one of the world’s highest environmental footprints:

if everyone lived as people do in Japan, we would need [2.7 Earths](#) to sustain us.

While Japan is perhaps the most extreme example, the same trend has been repeated across many parts of the world, including in South Korea and China, with both instituting a volte-face in their previous positions on fertility.

However, calls for increasing the birth rate in order to increase the labour force and provide for ageing generations are misguided for a number of reasons. The ‘pensions crisis’ is mostly a transitory phenomenon caused by the post-WWII baby boom. As Diana Coole notes, increasing the number of births in

response to such problems will fail simply because by the time the new generation enters the workforce, the problem will be easing as baby-boomers die – and that big new generation will one day become a big old generation. Similarly, while immigration might offer a short-term solution, when those migrants who have settled permanently reach retirement age, they too will swell the number of old people, as will their children in time. And so an unsustainable cycle continues.

In fact, despite various policies designed to increase them, birth rates in Japan, China, and South Korea have remained relatively unresponsive, with little evidence in all three countries that couples have an appetite for larger families. After decades of isolationist and frequently xenophobic resistance to immigration, Japan has recently passed legislation allowing recruitment from outside Japan to solve its labour shortage and increase the tax base. Of course, this is a very familiar solution to the ageing population and ‘pensions crisis’ in the USA, UK and other parts of Europe.

The notion that population declinism represents a crisis is based on an inability and unwillingness to think about ageing in a constructive and flexible way. Far from becoming burdens once they get a bus pass, people over 65 contribute around [£165 billion to the UK economy](#), for instance, through informal activities such as [child care \(p.13\)](#). Addressing the ‘pensions crisis’ requires willingness to consider less short term but also potentially less popular options, such as increased taxation or increasing the retirement age in line with greater longevity and better health. While in the [1970s men in the UK typically lived 11 years after retirement by 2004 this figure had increased to 17](#), in France, where Emmanuel Macron is currently meeting great resistance to his attempts to reform the pension system, the same period saw life expectancy on retirement [double from 11 to 22 years](#).

As with many issues in the sphere of public policy, the shift toward an ageing and shrinking population is a question of managing the short-term costs relative to the long-term benefits. A decline of human numbers on a global scale is essential to achieving

environmental sustainability, and since we have the largest environmental footprints, reducing numbers in the wealthiest parts of the world has the most immediate effect. Population ageing and the challenges it presents are an inevitable cost of welcome reductions in mortality coupled with the benefits of successful family planning and women’s empowerment, especially greater female participation in the labour force. The long-term need to shrink population in order to achieve better lives for all on a healthy planet is undeniable, but the short-term costs involve some hard choices and require careful management.

When it comes to environmental issues, the short-termist business-as-usual thinking of national governments is frequently, and justly, condemned. However, the challenge of managing the transition toward an ageing population while keeping electorates happy is unenviable. For members of these ageing populations, that is the individuals experiencing the costs and disruption of this transition, the short-term is their most pressing concern. Although his intention was quite different, the economist John Maynard Keynes’ observation regarding the short and long-run is worth bearing in mind:

[“But this long run is a misleading guide to current affairs. In the long run we are all dead.”](#)

The set of arguments and concerns that Diana Coole calls population declinism aren’t easy to address. While a moment’s pause is enough for most people to recognise that increasing the number of young people simply leads to more old people in time, the genuine and sustainable solutions to an ageing population demand imagination and a bit of courage. What is absolutely clear is that ageing populations are far less of a threat than environmental catastrophe. Our societies need to start having realistic and mature discussions of these issues now. In an era of difficult choices, we need to keep our eyes on the big picture.

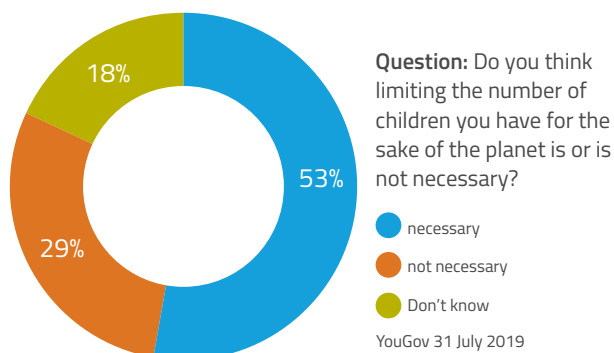
Prince Harry Thinks Small Families are Best!

In a British Vogue [interview](#) with Population Matters Patron **Dr Jane Goodall**, Prince Harry declared that he and Meghan Markle would have “Two, maximum!” out of concern for the planet when asked by Dr Goodall about desired family size.

“I’ve always thought this place is borrowed. And, surely, being as intelligent as we all are, or as evolved as we all are supposed to be, we should be able to leave something better behind for the next generation.”

HRH The Duke of Sussex

The Prince’s statement caused a media frenzy about hypothetical royal babies and more importantly, positive family planning choices. When [polled by YouGov](#), the majority of the British public agreed with the Duke of Sussex that it is necessary to limit one’s family size for the sake of the environment.



[New data released](#) by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), demonstrates that people are putting their beliefs into practice with the average number of children per woman in England and Wales having decreased from 1.76 in 2017 to 1.7 in 2018. The number of live births per 1,000 people is now 11.1 – the lowest rate since record-keeping began in 1938.

Prince Harry’s recent comments on choosing a small family for the sake of the planet caused a welcome swell in [media coverage](#) of population issues, with Population Matters viewed as the ‘go-to-organisation’ on the subject. This resulted in interviews on BBC Breakfast, Radio 5 Live and Radio 4 PM programmes among many others. Population is starting to be reconsidered as we focus on peoples’ right to choose when and how many children to have. Media outlets around the world are starting to tackle this previously taboo subject and asking Population Matters to comment.

Encouraging and enabling people to choose small families is at the heart of Population Matters’ work. For more information please visit populationmatters.org/smaller-families

Some of our recent media coverage





2040

Join the Regeneration

Population Matters Director **Robin Maynard** was inspired by the documentary film looking at workable solutions to our great environmental challenges.

Finding grounds for real hope for our future, without being seduced by unproven tech-fixes or falling into naïve optimism that somehow humanity will muddle through, when you know the scale and pace of the challenges confronting life on Earth, isn't easy. But that's what Australian filmmaker Damon Gameau sets out to do in the new documentary, '2040'. Like many of us, Damon is conflicted, he knows the science but as the father of a young daughter, he is driven not to succumb to negative fatalism. 2040's quest is to find workable solutions that could, if scaled up, ensure his daughter grows up in a future not foreclosed by climate chaos and social breakdown.

Population Matters (PM) was invited to the premiere of the film in London and, following the showing, asked to offer a few words from our perspective to the audience of politicians, policymakers, academics and activists. This proved to be a more positive and receptive experience than expected – because whilst showcasing several effective and scalable solutions from solar electricity micro-grids transforming lives

in India, to carbon-sequestering fast growing ocean kelp forests – 2040 concludes with a strong endorsement of our analysis and the available solutions.

In a long sequence, featuring Paul Hawken, founder of Project Drawdown, the film's enduring take-away is that, notwithstanding the other practical solutions examined, addressing population growth by enabling universal education for girls and the right of women globally to access safe, modern contraception are the most powerful means to curb climate change and improve human wellbeing. 2040's end vision of humanity living in harmony with the natural world tends perhaps a little too much towards the Utopian – but the producers are to be commended for having the courage and honesty to highlight population as the key factor determining the better or worse state of humanity's future. [2040 goes on release in the UK on 15th November](#), PM has been in ongoing discussions with the producers to help promote the film and, more importantly, the debate and actions arising from it. More info can be found here: whatsyour2040.com

TAKE ACTION!

Choose to be part of the online Population Matters media movement.

Human population growth and its role in the 'Sixth Mass Extinction' has long been the elephant in the room. Taboos, however, are finally being broken and the need to consider global population growth and its impact on our fragile and finite planet is being acknowledged. The more of us sharing knowledge and insights about global population growth and

its ramifications for our beautiful planet, the more people we will reach and influence. In a world of limited resources our reproductive and consumption choices are critical – every choice counts.

Choose to [follow us online](#) so you can easily share infographics, posts and articles with your friends and followers.

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"I support Population Matters because they're the only people pointing out the obvious link between ever more people and ever less wildlife." PM Patron Chris Packham



Enabling Choice In Nigeria

Empowering women, communities and organisations to make the right choices.

Population Matters' **Florence Blondel** in conversation with **Dr Edu Effiom**, Director of Biodiversity at Nigeria's Cross River State Forestry Commission. Edu spoke passionately at the PM Conference in April, emphasising the need to address both consumption and population in conservation efforts and the importance of educating girls to bring down high fertility rates in the Global South.

FB: Let's start by talking about how and why you chose to become a forest biologist.

EE: Well, I have always loved to stay close to and find ways of improving human co-existence with nature. Firstly, being a forest biologist is one way to do that, and secondly, my state has over 50% of Nigeria's remaining intact forests. This has been one of the main drivers for me, scientifically seeking strategies to preserve our heritage and extend the forest cover not only locally, but also globally to mitigate climate change.

FB: What have been the highs and lows of your work in this field?

EE: The ability to implement a sustainable forest management strategy that not only mitigates climate change, enhances biodiversity conservation but also impacts positively on human livelihood and wellbeing. The low point has been the lack of funding to follow through with the implementation of plans.

FB: Nigeria has the world's highest deforestation rate, at about 3.5% per year. Why is that, and as a lover of and fighter for forests, how does it make you feel?

EE: Deforestation is primarily due to the inability to properly balance development and conservation goals. It doesn't make anybody feel good.

FB: Among the many roles you hold, you are charged with looking at the impact of anthropogenic activities on biodiversity. What's your take on poverty accounting for majority of the rural people depending on the forests?

EE: First of all, there are not many forests for them to rely on as almost half of all the states of the federation do not have viable forests that can sustain their livelihoods. The majority of our rural populace, however, are farmers.

FB: Nigeria is the most populous African country, and projections put it at 3rd largest in the world by 2050. It also has one of the world's lowest modern contraceptive prevalence rates at 12% currently. Do you see a need to address the unprecedented population growth, and how do you think this can be done?

EE: Clearly yes, primarily because its impact weighs heavily on the vulnerable groups, women and children who incidentally have not had a fair chance to build their capacity to make choices for themselves. The way out is to give the girl child equal opportunities to their male counterpart, to get quality education to enhance her ability to make the right choices.

FB: What responsibilities do you think countries in the developed world have in regard to population?

EE: Accountable leadership, formulate deliberate policies to protect and educate the girl child, facilitate affordable, creative, and ethical planned parenthood.

FB: Let's go back to you. As an educated and empowered woman, what was the experience for you while growing up as a young girl in Nigeria, especially in terms of accessibility to sexual and reproductive health (SRH)?

© Doug Linstead



© Annie Spratt



© Arend de Haas



The critically endangered Cross River gorilla is the world's rarest great ape with only 200 to 300 left in the wild. They live in a few forest patches in Nigeria and Cameroon where conservation efforts are underway to bring the tiny population back from the brink by tackling deforestation and poaching.

EE: Well, I was fortunate to have parents who believe that all sexes are an equal blessing from God, so, though my parents were average income earners, they sacrificed a lot to ensure that I had a quality education. The education goes with accessibility to sexual and reproductive health. I am doing the same for my three daughters.

FB: How are things for your daughters' generation and is there any advice you'd give to younger girls and women in Nigeria?

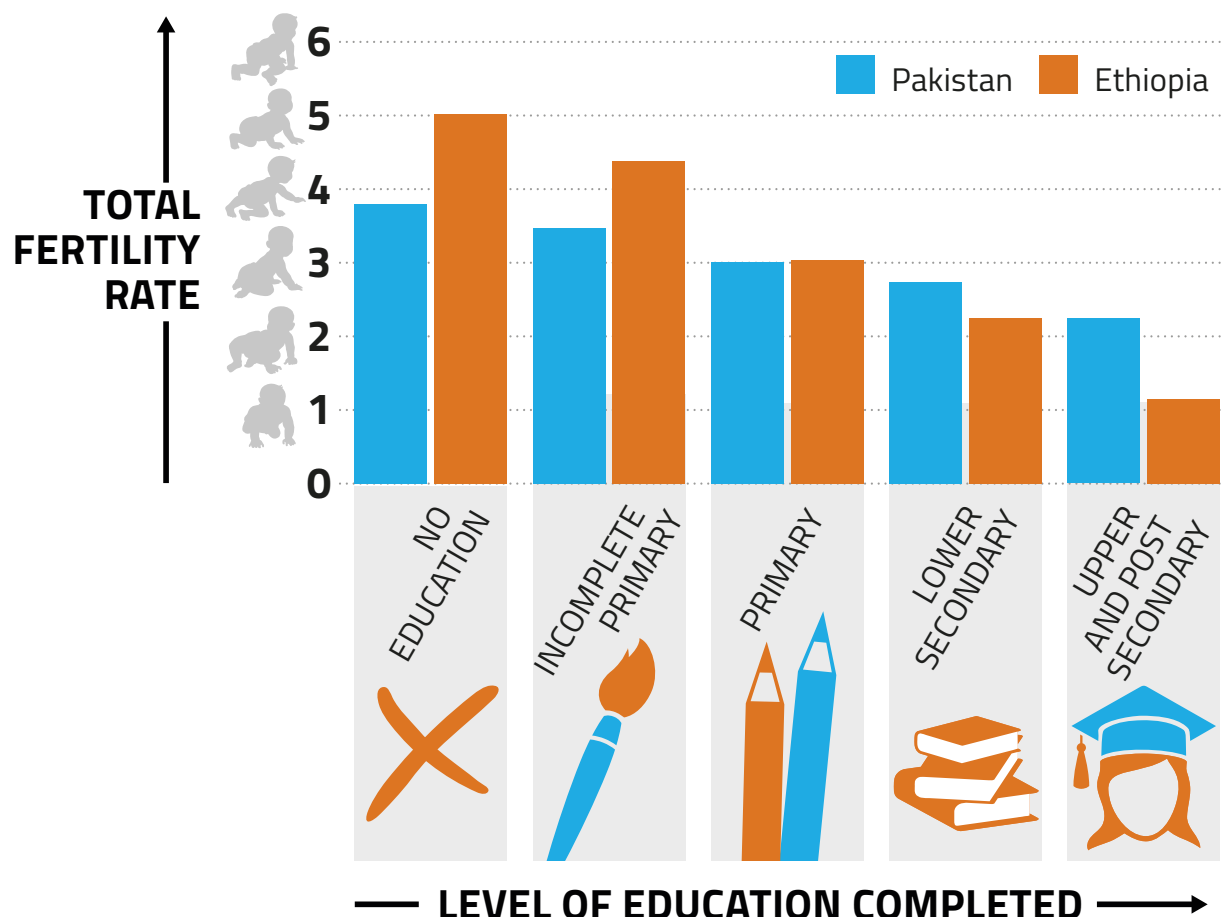
EE: I always tell them to believe in themselves and steer clear of any attempt by anyone trying to put them down, use every opportunity they have to gain education for I know that is one of their primary tickets to a better life.

FB: You played a great role at our conference ^(p7) as well as in helping us have a joint successful event with the Nigerian Conservation Foundation on World Population Day ^(p8). You have even agreed to join our Advisory Council, thank you so much. Why do you believe in the work of Population Matters?

EE: Well, I believe that with the right and robust advocacy, we can enforce the desired change we all want to see in terms of enhanced human wellbeing. We can do this in many ways, including achieving a sizeable population that we can sustain without jeopardising the choices of the vulnerable groups and the wholesomeness of the ecosystem. I am firmly persuaded that this is what PM is pushing for and so they have my support.

The way out is to give the girl child equal opportunities to their male counterpart, to get quality education to enhance her ability to make the right choices.

EDUCATION MAKES A DIFFERENCE



**THE HIGHER THE
LEVEL OF GIRLS'
EDUCATION
THE SMALLER THE
FAMILY SIZE THEY
CHOOSE**

Total fertility rate by education 2010 - 2015. Data from Lutz et al