

# POPULATION MATTERS

Issue 37 Autumn 2020

## WORLD POPULATION DAY 2020

“Family planning, education and boosting gender equality are the key solutions that empower people to take charge of their lives and protect our only planet”

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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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t: 020 8123 9116

e: [enquiries@populationmatters.org](mailto:enquiries@populationmatters.org)

ed: [magazine.editor@populationmatters.org](mailto:magazine.editor@populationmatters.org)

a: 135-137 Station Road, London E4 6AG

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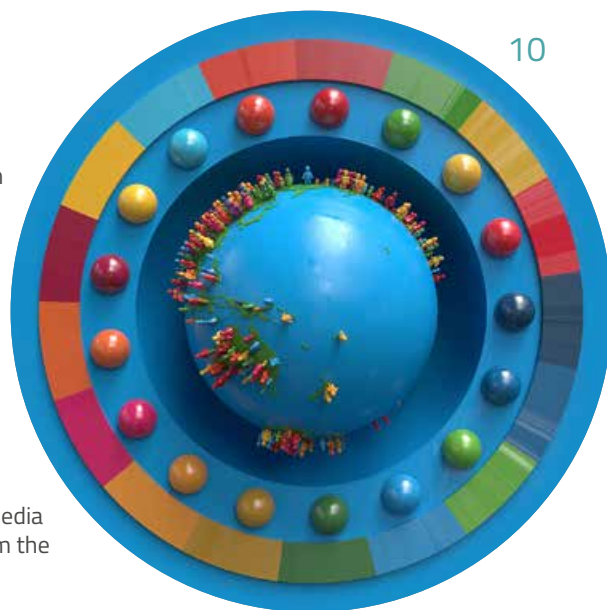
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# From the Director

Almost 30 years after Population Matters was founded, we're gaining increased support from scientists, environmental and conservation bodies and women's empowerment groups.

© Florence Blondel



**This issue contains** some shocking numbers, some of which will be familiar – such as a 68% decline in wild vertebrate populations since 1970, up from 60% reported in 2018 – as detailed in WWF's latest *Living Planet Report*.

Having failed to mention that population growth is one of the key drivers for those losses in previous reports, this year, the Panda places a tentative paw on the 'p' word, stating: *"Since 1970, these trends have been driven in large part by a doubling of the world's human population, a fourfold increase in the global economy, and a tenfold increase in trade."*

It's high time that conservation bodies acknowledge this connection – these numbers are not opinions they are facts endorsed by leading scientific bodies such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Biological Diversity and Ecosystem Services. The connection is affirmed in the 50 peer-reviewed studies collated by the Centre for Biological Diversity for their Crowded Planet resource library.

## POSITIVE SOLUTIONS

What's still lacking is the promotion of positive solutions, such as improving the wellbeing and life opportunities of women and girls globally. There are 272 million girls and women currently lacking access to safe, modern contraception and, thereby, choice over whether, when and how many children to have. This is something that guest

Today, diverse, globally representative, significant voices are supporting our agenda, adding to our capacity to bring positive changes for people and planet.

writer Mari Thekaekara explores in her personal account of India's population drive on page 15, which recounts the country's troubled history and raises important issues about education and the empowerment of women and girls.

Worldwide, a significant number live in the US and UK – shockingly high for two of the richest, most developed countries in the world. As Kat Dixon reports on page 7, although England has reduced the teenage pregnancy rate by nearly two-thirds over the last two decades, it's still higher than most of our European neighbours. What's more, while child marriage is most common in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, research carried out by Unchained At Last – an organisation dedicated to ending child marriage – states that, between 2000 and 2015, more than 200,000 minors were legally married in the USA.

Through our Empower to Plan crowdfunding initiative we support groups such as You Before Two, which provides young girls (and boys) with

information and support to avoid unplanned pregnancies. The positive impact is clear from 17-year-old Katie's reaction, after viewing PM's *Smaller Families'* video: *"These facts and figures (environmental and population) should be taught alongside sex education and made compulsory."*

## FIRM FOUNDATIONS

Next year marks three decades since Population Matters was conceived (sic) by a small group of far-sighted individuals, working with great individual energy but few resources and little money. The next issue of the magazine, which falls in 2021, will mark that anniversary and acknowledge those individuals' efforts. Thanks to the foundations they laid, Population Matters has been able to extend its reach, activities and influence.

Today, diverse, globally representative, significant voices are supporting our agenda, adding to our capacity to bring positive changes for people and planet. These include a large and growing body of scientists; environmental and conservation bodies based outside the UK, Europe and the US; women's grassroots empowerment and rights' groups; and a growing number of supporters globally who understand that achieving sustainability and justice demands we consider both individual footprint and collective feet.

I'll leave the final word to our colleague Florence Blondel, who has left PM to move to the US but has clearly not left the movement: *"It's not rocket science that the more of us there are, the more we consume and the fewer the natural resources. We are decimating forests and having endless wars with wildlife – wars we always win. Worse is the fact that young girls and women are held back as fertility is sadly largely socially determined. This is not okay."*

**Robin Maynard**

Director, Population Matters



# Population Matters news round-up

## Human-caused extinction accelerating

**A new analysis shows the sixth mass extinction is accelerating, with more than 500 vertebrate species at risk of becoming extinct in less than 20 years – as many as were lost over the entire course of the last century.**

The study published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) by scientists, including PM Patron Paul Ehrlich, found that out of almost 30,000 species of land-dwelling vertebrates, 515 already have fewer than 1,000 individuals left. More than half of these species have been reduced to 250 or fewer individuals.

There have already been five mass extinction episodes over the last 450 million years – each caused by catastrophic environmental changes such as volcanic activity or an asteroid strike. The sixth mass extinction is due to human activity.

The authors point out that the human population explosion is making it increasingly difficult for other species to thrive, warning: “The window of opportunity is almost closed. We must save what we can or lose the opportunity to do so forever. What is at stake is the fate of humanity and future generations deserve better from us.”



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[Link to page 8 to read more about the connection between biodiversity and population >>](#)

## How will we feed the world?

**Global adoption of G20 countries' food consumption patterns would ruin our chances of meeting climate and sustainability targets, according to a new report. The authors state that this trend will exceed the planetary boundary for food-related emissions by almost three-fold and require up to seven Earths to support it.**

*Diets for a Better Future*, published by EAT, emphasises the importance of a drastic dietary reduction in animal products and that sustainable, healthy diets is likely to become impossible if our population exceeds 10 billion people, as is expected to happen in the latter half of the century. Agriculture already uses 40% of the Earth's land area and is the primary driver of deforestation, habitat destruction and biodiversity loss. Food production is responsible for a quarter of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

The report notes that, despite the huge impact of food systems on climate change and biodiversity, they have largely been omitted from international policy agendas. It warns that if we continue on current trajectories, we will not meet either the Paris Agreement, which aims to restrict warming to below 2°C, or the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

[Link to page 10 to read more about our thoughts on meeting the SDGs >>](#)



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## How the numbers stack up

**3 out of 21**

To date, only three out of 21 of the UN's landmark environment and poverty reduction targets for 2020 have been hit.

**71 million**

The additional number of people who will have been pushed into extreme poverty in 2020 due to the global pandemic

**1/4**

The amount of the world's population that lack access to secure food supply

**4.2 billion**

The number of people who lack safely managed sanitation

**700 million**

The number of people set to be displaced by 2030 due to water scarcity

**3 Earths**

We are already using resources 1.75 times faster than they can regenerate and, unless things change, we will require three Earths to supply our needs by 2050

## Millions of women and girls still being harmed



© Unsplash/Nick Gordon

The latest UNFPA State of the World Population report shows that millions of women and girls across the world are still subjected to violent and harmful practices, including child marriages, female genital mutilation (FGM), and gender-biased sex selection. Due to population growth

and stagnating progress towards gender equality, hindered by COVID-19, the number of victims is still on the rise.

*Against My Will: Defying the Practises that Harm Women and Girls and Undermine Equality*, notes that millions of women and girls continue to be subjected to FGM every year. In countries that have passed laws against FGM, the practice has been driven underground. Harmful practices are not limited to the developing world. Although child marriage is illegal in the UK, during 2018 almost a third of the calls received by the UK's Forced Marriages Unit concerned children. And, between 2000 and 2015, more than 200,000 minors were married in the USA.

# 30 years of campaigning to make a better future possible

## 2021 will mark Population Matters' 30th Anniversary

This milestone in our history presents us with an opportunity to focus on accelerating our campaign to achieve a sustainable human population, to protect the natural world and improve people's lives.

So, what might the next 30 years look like? The momentum for real change is growing. Whether it is young people protesting against climate change, the worldwide support for Black Lives Matter, or heightened community spirit amid the COVID-19 pandemic, we know that global activism is creating a springboard for positive change. We can and will be part of it – and achieving our vision will become ever-more possible.

With our growing global reach, for our 30th anniversary in 2021, we want to celebrate hidden voices, ignite conversations across generations and encourage new dialogues about population across our community of 20,000 supporters in 80 different countries. We want to inspire everyone to be part of a movement that will make it possible to solve our global environmental problems. We'll be updating you on our 30th anniversary plans later in the year.



## NOTABLE DATES IN OUR HISTORY

**1990** Population Matters formed as the Optimum Population Trust by David Willey and others

**1991** First official meeting held in Oxford on 24 July

**2009** Sir David Attenborough becomes a patron

**2012** Royal Society report *People and the Planet* states that population and environment issues must be addressed together, affirming our agenda

**2019** PM holds events on three continents for World Population Day

**2020** PM publishes the ground-breaking report *Hitting the Targets*



## Introducing some new members of the Population Matters team

### Katrina Dixon

Campaigner



"I worked in marketing communications for a decade, while developing a growing interest in environmental, political and social justice issues. I decided that I wanted to focus my work on 'making the world a better place' and so, I changed my career path. My friends and I have spent many days and nights discussing how clear the link between environmental issues, inequality and poverty and the increasingly unsustainable global population seemed to be to us. I was therefore very excited to discover the work of Population Matters. As a feminist, I was also encouraged to see the work that Population Matters does in supporting women's rights, especially through its Empower to Plan scheme with small grassroots NGOs."

### Izi Clery

Fundraising Manager



"I've worked in fundraising for a range of organisations. I was drawn to Population Matters because I've been anecdotally exclaiming "there are just too many people on the planet!" for years, whenever environmental issues arose in conversation. I felt it was time I gave substance to those words. Fundraisers are the enablers of 'good things', connecting passionate people to causes that matter – and I can't see a more important cause than one that is striving for a better future for everyone and the environment that supports us. I'm looking forward to getting to know PM's members and supporters and finding new ways we can work together in pursuit of our vision."

### Gabriel Emordi

Finance and Administration Officer



"For the last 20 years I've worked in the not for profit and charity sector. I've always had a great interest in nature and grew up watching David Attenborough documentaries on TV. This started an interest in nature and the environment which led to related interest in issues such as population growth and sustainability. To me, the idea of there being a maximum level of consumption that the planet can sustain seems obvious, so it was a pretty easy decision for me to want to get involved when I found that Population Matters was looking for staff in my field of work – my focus is on maintaining efficient financial processes within the organisation. I think it's absolutely imperative that we face this challenge, head on."

# Should we fear a population crash?

Falling fertility rates, shrinking populations and a world full of old people – the media's scare story approach detracts from the real issues, argues PM's Alistair Currie.

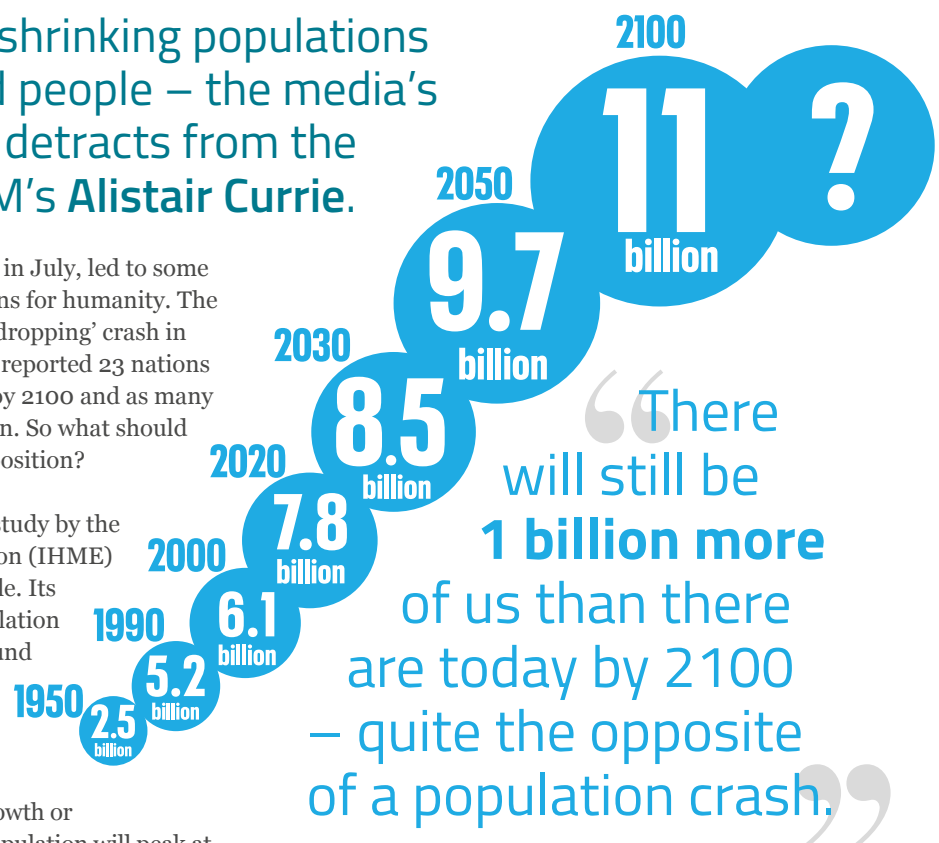
A new study, published in *The Lancet* in July, led to some sensational headlines and dire predictions for humanity. The BBC and other media referred to a 'jaw-dropping' crash in the number of babies being born, with a reported 23 nations expected to see their populations halve by 2100 and as many people turning 80 as there are being born. So what should we make of all this speculation and supposition?

The source of this media hyperbole is a study by the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington in Seattle. Its focus was to look at how 'changing population size and age structure might have profound economic, social, and geopolitical impacts in many countries.'

Using a model of fertility, migration and mortality rates to estimate population growth or decline, IHME predicts that the global population will peak at 9.7 billion around 2064 and then fall to 8.8 billion by 2100. This differs from the UN's higher prediction of 10.9bn and still rising by the end of the century. However, even if the IHME's projections are right, 2bn people will be added to Earth's population over the next 40 years, and there will still be 1bn more of us than there are today by 2100 – quite the opposite of a population crash.

## UNREACHED GOALS

Other demographers have challenged the study's approach and results. Its projections differ from the UN's because it considers factors which the UN currently doesn't, such as access to education and contraception. However, the researchers have made some assumptions about future trends that seem highly optimistic. As we report on p10, the world is not on track to meet the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and, worryingly, in some crucial respects is going backwards. Critically, more women than ever before have an unmet need for contraception, according to recent research, and threats – from the impact of COVID-19 to US aid cuts – endanger progress even further. Indeed, the study's authors themselves recognise that talk of 'declining' populations poses what they call 'a very real danger' that 'some states might consider adopting policies that restrict female reproductive



health rights and access to services.' These rights and services are not just essential to addressing population, but to the wellbeing, life chances and freedom of hundreds of millions of people.

## REASONS TO BE FEARFUL

The study concludes with a discussion of the implications of its findings. That contains just two sentences addressing the benefits to the environment, and four pages speculating about the economic challenges to governments of population reduction and the implications of a society with more older people in it.

It is absolutely necessary to prepare for a world with different demographics than we have today, but these are challenges that can be met (you can read more about this in issue 35, p14). The challenges of increased population and consumption, however, are even more profound, and far more threatening. These include crashing biodiversity, hunger, poverty and worsening climate change.

The possibility of a substantially lower population than the UN currently projects is, of course, very welcome. It would represent hugely reduced pressure on our environment and natural resources. Yet these new projections do not mean that will happen. That will depend on continued investment in the positive solutions which reduce population growth and continuing to reinforce the message that small families are essential if we are to have decent lives for all on a healthy planet.

## FIND OUT MORE

To read a more detailed analysis of the study, visit [populationmatters.org/two-billion-fewer-people](https://populationmatters.org/two-billion-fewer-people)



# Children by choice, rather than chance

Despite a 'Strategy' and a 'Framework', the teenage pregnancy rate continues to be high. So, asks PM's **Kat Dixon**, what's going on?

In 1999, the government introduced a Teenage Pregnancy Strategy for England and, between 1998 and 2017, achieved a reduction in the under-18 conception rate between 1998-2017 by almost two-thirds. However, the rate of conception amongst teenagers remains higher than many comparable western European countries.

Even more worrying is the fact that inequalities still exist between and within areas of the UK. The teenage conception rate in 2018 was higher in the 50% most deprived areas in England. Clearly, more needs to be done to improve Relationships & Sex Education (RSE) provision, and access to contraceptives and sexual health services for young people.

In 2018, Public Health England published its Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Framework to address these issues – but flattening the curve of teenage pregnancies looks less and less achievable, due to a perfect storm of factors.

Last year, one of the UK's longest-running sexual and reproductive health charities, the Family Planning Association (FPA) went into liquidation after operating for almost 100 years.



“Flattening the curve of teenage pregnancies looks less achievable due to a perfect storm of factors”

Over the past five years, there have also been unprecedented family planning funding cuts. COVID-19 has had an impact too. RSE was set to become compulsory in England's state primary schools and secondary schools from this September. This has now been pushed back to give schools more time to recover from closures during the COVID-19 crisis.

This delay will likely have long-term implications. International studies have identified a strong link between the provision of high-quality RSE,

contraception use and impact on teenage pregnancy rates. Young women who cite school as their main source of relationship and sex education are more likely to delay having sex, use contraception the first time they have sex less and are less likely to become pregnant by the age of 18

Taking a wider perspective, unintended teenage pregnancies have significant human costs. The Nuffield Trust states: “Research has shown that teenage pregnancy is associated with poorer outcomes for both young parents and their children. Teenage mothers are less likely to finish their education, are more likely to bring up their child alone and in poverty and have a higher risk of mental health problems.”

## FIND OUT MORE

Visit [populationmatters.org/family-planning-resources](https://populationmatters.org/family-planning-resources)

To support UK organisations such as Jiysi, which works to empower young women and girls who have survived sexual violence, visit [EMPOWER TO PLAN](https://populationmatters.org/empower-to-plan)



## No plan for our overcrowded islands?

Senior parliamentarian Lord Hodgson takes aim at successive governments' passive acceptance of the projected population growth, writes PM's **Robin Maynard**.

In his recently published pamphlet, *Overcrowded Islands? The challenges of demographic change for the United Kingdom*, Lord Hodgson casts a spotlight on the government's unquestioning approach in passively accepting the projected population growth of some 3 million more people by 2030 and a total of 6 million more by 2040. His comprehensive analysis examines the many impacts of population growth in the UK.

Hodgson takes a careful look at the economic implications of demographic change, challenging many of the assumptions that underlie concerns about ageing populations. The principle call to action is for a 'Demographic Authority', an independent department within

government responsible for assessing evidence and providing recommendations to policymakers. This is along very similar lines to Population Matters' longstanding campaign for an evidence-based, integrated, strategic and ethical Sustainable Population Policy.

Disappointingly, his valuable pamphlet does shy away from discussing positive solutions such as empowering women, reducing teen pregnancies (see above) and promoting the benefits that smaller families bring to people and planet.

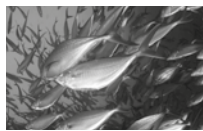
Any discussion of the environmental impacts of population growth must also recognise the importance of addressing our unsustainable levels of per capita consumption here in the UK and other developed countries.



## FIND OUT MORE

Visit [populationmatters.org/sustainable-population-policy](https://populationmatters.org/sustainable-population-policy)



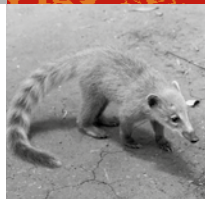
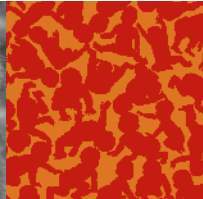
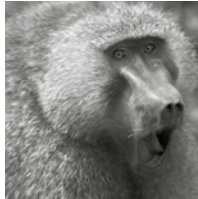


# A planet on the brink of



# BIOLOGICAL

While the impact of human population extends to almost every imaginable component of our environmental problems, there are few areas in which it is more well-evidenced and extreme than biodiversity loss, writes PM's **Alistair Currie**.



**Biodiversity** is a term used to describe the enormous variety of life on Earth, where each species, no matter how small, has an important role to play. Biodiversity is essential for a productive ecosystem and a healthy planet. Yet, right now, many species are on the brink of extinction. Experts estimate we are losing species at perhaps 1,000 times the level that would exist without human activity. Once gone, they are lost forever.

So many scientific papers and studies cross our desks linking the two that we cannot even report on them all (our friends at the Center for Biological Diversity in the US have produced a comprehensive database at [crowdedplanet.org](http://crowdedplanet.org)). While the evidence piles up (see news on p4), however, almost nothing is being done in response.

## SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY

As we reported in our Autumn 2019 issue, there is a current opportunity to move population up the conservation agenda. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the key international treaty intended to safeguard

biodiversity. So far it has largely failed – the targets it set 10 years ago for 2020 are almost all going to be missed. The CBD is now establishing what it calls the 'Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework', which will set targets and approaches to meet them for the decades ahead.

Population Matters is actively campaigning to have the ethical and empowering solutions to population growth recognised as vital components of protecting biodiversity in the Post-2020 Framework. To mark the International Day for Biological Diversity on 22 May, we contacted the ministers of 20 nations to ask them to support measures to address population under the CBD. We also launched our new online email action, which allows members of the public to contact the government in their country direct to make the same case.

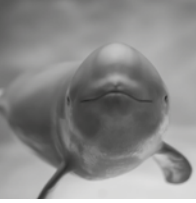
Shortly after that action we met with Rebecca Pow MP, one of the UK government ministers responsible for biodiversity. Ms Pow was already aware of population issues and receptive to our arguments, although, typically

**“We’re not addressing the one single factor that’s putting more pressure on the ecosystem than any other – namely the ever increasing size of the world’s population.”**

**Chris Packham**  
PM Patron

for such meetings, she remained non-committal on the UK lobbying in support of population action. We are continuing to press that case through our involvement in the government's CBD Stakeholder Forum, which brings together organisations with an interest in the issue.

Sadly, many conservation organisations see population as too controversial a debate to become involved in publicly, even when they recognise its impact and sometimes even take action to address it. We are working hard to break the taboo. Our recently achieved membership of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (more



# COLLAPSE



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## Welcome to the anthropocene

We've entered the age in which the main force altering the planet is us

■ Driven by our rapid population and economic growth, habitat loss and overexploitation of natural resources are the primary causes of biodiversity loss – which is now happening up to a thousand times faster than for millions of years before.

■ The Earth's plants and animals have continued to evolve over the 65 million years since the last mass extinction. But many scientists consider the huge reduction in biodiversity since the emergence of humans is now on the scale of another mass extinction. This is known as the Anthropocene extinction or sixth mass extinction.

■ WWF's latest *Living Planet Report* estimates that we have lost 68% of all vertebrate wildlife populations since 1970. That's more than half of all birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and fish gone in just 50 years. During that time, our population has more than doubled, increasing from 3.7 billion to more than 7.7 billion today.

■ According to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, 41% of amphibians, 25% of mammals, 34% of conifers, 13% of birds, 31% of sharks and rays, 33% of reef-building corals, and 27% of crustaceans are threatened with extinction.

**If we don't take action, the collapse of our civilisations and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon.**

**Sir David Attenborough**  
PM Patron

popularly known as IUCN) which has 1,300 member organisations, will allow us to do far more to forge links with other organisations – and we will be attending its international congress when the event is rescheduled.

### SEEING THE WHOLE PICTURE

Meanwhile, we have continued to submit evidence and calls for action to the official process of developing the Post-2020 Framework, most recently, to a consultation inviting comments on how the Convention can be tied more closely to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This was a key opportunity to build on our recent work on the SDGs, and most importantly, to press for an integrated and holistic approach to meeting them.

**I would encourage every single conservation organisation, every single government, to consider the absurdity of unlimited economic development on a planet with finite natural resources. We can't push human population growth under the carpet.**

**Dame Jane Goodall,**  
PM Patron speaking at our 2019  
Last Elephant in the Room conference

Governments can help achieve their environmental targets by investing in and supporting measures which reduce population growth, at the same time improving people's lives and accelerating progress to achieving other targets.

We know there are species of animals and plants today that it is already too late to save. If we're to protect nature in the future, including population solutions as part of a holistic approach is vital.

### TAKE ACTION

More than 1,000 people in 37 countries have contacted their governments to ask them to support measures to address population under the CBD. If you haven't done so yet, please visit [populationmatters.org/cbd-action](https://populationmatters.org/cbd-action)



# WORLD POPULATION

## Are we running out of time to secure a

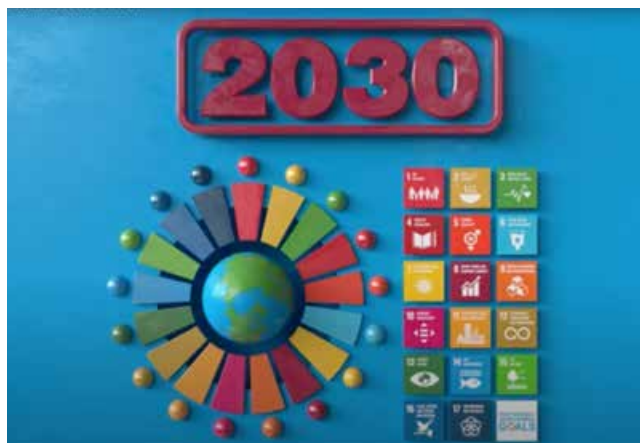
With only 10 years left to meet the United Nation's 17 goals of achieving decent lives for all on a healthy planet, one question looms large: why isn't population higher up the global agenda?

**Saturday 11 July** marked World Population Day (WPD) and, for Population Matters, it was the culmination of a series of digital events designed to encourage and inspire people to talk about population issues. This year, our theme and activities centred around the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to achieve decent lives for all on a healthy planet by 2030. However, as things stand, many of these goals are likely to be missed. Amongst many reasons, this is partly because the issue of human population growth is not being addressed.

### TAKING ACTION IN CHALLENGING TIMES

Unlike last year when we had the luxury to stage events in three cities – Lagos, London and New York – this year, due to the pandemic, we scaled up our digital activity to reach a global audience online:

- We launched a new animated video ***Population and the Sustainable Development Goals*** explaining how population solutions accelerate progress towards the SDGs.
- We counted down the days to WPD on social media with striking graphics and short videos explaining the links between population and each of the 17 SDGs, inviting leading environment, health and development experts to comment on how population impacts on some of the goals.
- We hosted a panel discussion with experts from Kenya, India and the US, which was livestreamed on Facebook, and watched by almost 2,000 people around the world.
- We launched a ground-breaking 24-page report on population and the SDGs for policymakers and international stakeholders.



### What does our report reveal?

Our new report – *Hitting the Targets: The case for ethical and empowering population policies to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals* – calls for urgent global action to empower people to choose smaller families. The report, authored by PM's Alistair Currie and Nina Jatana, reveals how progress towards meeting many of the goals has been handicapped by population growth – and how in some cases, is cancelled out entirely. Some of the key facts highlighted include:

- In June 2020, the World Bank forecast that population growth in the three countries which between them have a third of the world's poor – Nigeria, India and the Democratic Republic of Congo – will outstrip economic growth, leading to more poverty
- The number of people relying on polluting fuels and technologies for cooking has increased, reaching an estimated 3 billion people
- The number of people living in slums has grown from an estimated 792 million in 2000, to more than 1 billion in 2016
- In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of girls out of secondary school has increased by 7 million due to the region's population growth
- The number of women and girls subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM) is growing because of population growth, and could increase from 4.1 million in 2020 to 4.6 million a year by 2030
- If current population projections prove correct, by the second half of the century, humankind will not be able to feed the global population without causing irreversible environmental destruction

Robin Maynard, Director of Population Matters, comments:  
*"Family planning, education and boosting gender equality are the key solutions that empower people to take charge of their lives and protect our only planet. It's clear that without a sustainable global population, the UN's SDGs will not be met"*

[READ OUR REPORT](#)



# DAY 2020

## sustainable future?

### What's missing from the UN's 17 SDGs?

While noble in their aspiration, the fact that many of the UN's SDGs are likely to be missed by 2030 means that a greater emphasis must be given to the impact of population. Here are just some of the reasons why...



**1 NO POVERTY**  
Large family size and poverty often go hand-in-hand. The poorest people struggle to access contraception and may choose larger families because of child mortality and to provide economic security. Where poverty is tackled, family sizes go down.



**2 ZERO HUNGER**  
Feeding the world without destroying more nature will become increasingly difficult and eventually impossible under sustained population growth.



**3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**  
Insufficient funding for healthcare systems can cause them to buckle under the pressure of growing populations. Worldwide, almost half of all pregnancies are unintended and lack of access to or inadequate family planning services contributes to more than 800 women a day dying because of pregnancy or giving birth.



**4 QUALITY EDUCATION**  
Greater investment in quality education is key to alleviating poverty and ending population growth. The more years a woman spends in education, the smaller her family size.



**5 GENDER EQUALITY**  
Empowering women and girls to take control of their bodies and lives is crucial for solving our biggest social and environmental crises. Gender inequality is one of the main drivers of high fertility rates. Not a single country has yet managed to achieve full equality.



**6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION**  
The combination of climate change and population growth is fuelling a global water crisis. Experts estimate that by 2050, 5 billion people – more than half the global population – will live in water-stressed regions.



**7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY**  
Global energy demand is expected to increase by 50% over the next 30 years as a result of population growth and economic development.



**8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH**  
A high number of young dependents makes economic prosperity almost impossible. Infinite economic and population growth can never be sustainable on a finite planet.



**9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**  
The larger the population, the harder it is to provide access to modern infrastructure and technologies for everyone. Conversion of land to human infrastructure is a key driver of biodiversity loss, and construction is a major source of greenhouse gases.



**10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES**  
A more just global system, in which resources are distributed more equitably, is essential. Choosing a small family is particularly impactful among the wealthiest countries.



**11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES**  
More than half the world's population lives in urban areas today. By 2050, this is expected to rise to 68%. Rapid urban population growth can outstrip the pace at which infrastructure such as clean water, sanitation, health, jobs and education can be offered.



**12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION**  
Responsible consumption and production of food and goods must go hand-in-hand with measures to end our population growth.



**13 CLIMATE ACTION**  
A comprehensive review of available climate solutions by Project Drawdown found that slowing population growth through the combination of educating girls and providing family planning would be one of the most powerful ways to reduce atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> by 2050.



**14 LIFE BELOW WATER**  
Pollution (plastic and runoff), overfishing, coral bleaching, and coastal ecosystem destruction all exacerbated by population growth. Two-thirds of marine areas have been damaged by human activity.



**15 LIFE ON LAND**  
Human population growth is one of the main causes of biodiversity loss. According to WWF, we have lost 68% of all vertebrate wildlife populations since 1970. During that time, the human population has more than doubled.



**16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS**  
Educating and empowering women and communities and ensuring access to voluntary family planning services can help support peace and stability goals by increasing the foundation for stability.



**17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS**  
Cross-sectoral partnerships that recognise the links between social and environmental issues are key to a better future. COVID-19 has presented unprecedented challenges, reversing decades of development. If the goals are to be achieved, a holistic approach is essential.

# WORLD POPULATION DAY 2020

## THE LIVE DISCUSSION

Valuable insight into the challenges surrounding population issues was provided by a team of experts and activists.



Hosted by our director, Robin Maynard, the online panel discussion raised the key issues that population needs to be discussed more openly, cultural barriers must be addressed and education is key to empowering women to be able to make reproductive choices. What was also clear was the intrinsic connection between population and sustainability – and that addressing global population growth is essential to the future survival of our planet.

Focusing on India, where family planning services and contraception is widely available and free, human rights activist Mari Thekaekara commented: “Legislation can’t overcome social and cultural barriers. Many Indian women still don’t get to decide how many children they have and the use of condoms has declined by more than 50% in the last decade. Education is key. In Kerala there is 100% literacy and women are educated as much as men so families have no more than one or two children by choice.”

### A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

Wendo Aszed, Founder and Executive Director of Dandelion Africa, emphasised the impact that grassroots action can have, stating: “Women can be a catalyst for change if they have every available resource to prosper. Dandelion Africa is making a difference by taking information,

knowledge and contraceptives door to door, village to village.”

### BY DESIGN NOT DISASTER

Laurel Hanscom, CEO of the Global Footprint Network, called for a more joined-up approach, stating: “A world where everyone can live well in ecological budget can only happen by design not disaster. Environmental sustainability is underrepresented in the SDG index. We can see clearly in the data how projected population growth is going to have a massive impact on our ability to live and thrive on our one planet. By the end of this century, we have median population projection of 11bn – and the more feet there are the less there is to go around.”

Kelley Dennings, Population and Sustainability Campaigner at the Center for Biological Diversity acknowledged some positives: “Because of COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement, culturally, there is a new focus on injustice. More people in the US have experienced food and energy insecurity and have difficulty accessing healthcare. A light has been shone on the inability to have growth at any cost. There’s a growing consensus that we need to build better, not go back to how things were.”

### FIND OUT MORE

Visit [populationmatters.org/take-action](https://populationmatters.org/take-action)



### THE PANEL

(Clockwise from left)

**Mari Thekaekara** is a human rights activist and writer based in Gudalur, Tamil Nadu. She is president of the Nilgiris chapter of All India Womens’ Conference. [See page 15 >>](#)

**Kelley Dennings** is Population and Sustainability Campaigner at the Center for Biological Diversity and works to highlight and address the connection between exponential human population growth and threats to endangered species and wild places.

**Laurel Hanscom** is CEO of the Global Footprint Network, a research organisation focused on how the world manages its natural resources and responds to climate change. [See page 18 for more >>](#)

**Wendo Aszed**, Founder and Executive Director of Dandelion Africa, an organisation she set up to empower women to make informed reproductive choices via peer-to-peer training in rural Kenya and supported by PM’s Empower to Plan.

### WHAT’S NEXT?

We want policymakers to talk openly and explicitly about population and elevate the value of empowering population policies to achieve progress across all the UN’s SDGs by:

- **Investing** in the ethical population solutions already embedded in Goals 1, 3, 4 and 5: No Poverty, Good Health and Wellbeing, Quality Education and Gender Equality
- **Promoting** the value and importance of smaller family size, in wealthy and poor countries alike
- **Ensuring** the value of ethical and empowering population action is recognised across all bodies and mechanisms intended to achieve the SDGs, including in multilateral environmental agreements
- **Pushing** for all international frameworks that are set up to create better, sustainable lives for all to address population growth

# "Why can't we talk about not having children?"

**Maxine Trump's** documentary *To Kid Or Not To Kid* explores the issue of reproductive choice. Here she shares five things that she hopes people will take away after watching her ground-breaking film.



Images courtesy of Maxine Trump

## There should be no judgement about the reproductive decisions that individuals make

It may be the biggest decision of one's life, yet some people don't feel they have the choice of whether or not to have kids. I heard this so many times while making the film and was shocked that people were telling me this even in New York City (where some of the film is based). Others have the choice taken away because they're unable to have children – a term known as childless. I used to call myself childless until someone educated me to the fact there is nothing 'less' in my choice to not have kids. The term I now use is childfree. To have or not have children is a human right that everybody should be able to exercise without judgment or criticism, and hey, let's face it, parenting is hard and might not suit everyone.

## Childfree by choice should be seen as something positive

In some countries and cultures, there's an expectation to have children, with larger families still considered to be something to aspire to. I really wanted to explore this pressure, where it's coming from and why. The UN states that almost half of women in 57 low- to middle-income countries have no decision-making power over their health, contraceptive use and sex lives. This has to change. If you decide you don't want children you should be able to make that choice. And your decision shouldn't have to be kept hidden. After all, we shouldn't be bringing unwanted children into an overpopulated world. I've seen the impact of unwanted children first-hand in films I've edited on the foster system.

## Watching the film will provide a space for people who aren't sure

In all of my films I strive not only to make them entertaining, (yes, there are quite a few laughs in the film) but also allow people room to consider how they feel about what they're watching. Viewers may have never considered this subject before, but, if they think they might not want children, they need to talk about it. So let's help remove some of the stigma, make it a casual conversation, just as it is if people want kids. Or share the film.

## Gender imbalance is challenged

If a man says he has no children or doesn't want any, it's rarely seen in a negative light. Why, in this day and age, is this not the same for women? They should not be made to feel they have failed as a woman or are in some way unfulfilled. It's time to challenge what's long been accepted as the norm. During this pandemic, it seems there's been a step backwards in gender stereotyping, with much of the childcare responsibilities resting with the woman again. We've made many steps forward in gender equality and we mustn't go back.

## Politicians must talk about over population

The human population is contributing to the environmental crisis we face today – climate change, poverty and species extinction are just some of the consequences of having more than 7.7 billion people on the planet. It was one of the reasons that I decided not to have children. I didn't want them enough and there seemed to be more compelling reasons not to have them. My legacy, I decided, was to protect the planet for other people's children. Yet, women continue to face pressure to have babies and it's explicitly encouraged by most religions and a number of national governments. In the film, we look at some of the ad campaigns put out by governments – from Denmark to Italy, Hungary to India – and it's an eye opener. The issue of population needs to move up the global agenda, fast.

## CHILDFREE BY CHOICE

*To Kid or Not To Kid* is the first English language feature documentary on making the choice to be child free. It challenges common perceptions and aims to dispel the myth that living childfree is weird, selfish or somehow wrong. The worldwide release was launched as a Population Matters special live event in June to rave reviews.

For more information about the film, visit [tokidornottokid.com](http://tokidornottokid.com)  
Available to view on Amazon Prime.



# Q&A with Pablo Meglioli

After successfully setting up Population Matters' first Facebook and Instagram pages in Spanish, the Argentinian activist achieved powerful media coverage in South America on World Population Day. PM's **Olivia Nater** spoke to him to find out more.



**Q: How did you first hear about Population Matters, and why did you want to get involved?**

**A:** I have participated in different NGOs that support the environment since I was 17 years old. Over the years, I've become increasingly aware that the mother of all environmental problems is the massive growth of the human population. I was then lucky enough to come across Population Matters, which, in my opinion, is the most courageous NGO, willing to address the issue of population head on. I attended PM's conference on biodiversity in London in 2019 and was able to meet the team, who were clearly serious and professional. I knew immediately that I wanted to offer my support, so, we worked with the PM team to set up a PM Español Facebook page, translating and re-posting content to raise awareness and get Spanish-speaking people involved. We now have 7,000 followers and, this year, we've set up an Instagram page too.

**Q: How have you found people respond to the Facebook page and Instagram? Are there particular things they are interested in?**

**A:** We were very surprised to find that many people are very interested in the issue of population – particularly young people. They are most concerned about women's rights and legalising abortion. We know that empowering women is the most effective way to reduce fertility rates and achieve a sustainable population size, so it's great that our young people want these important issues to be addressed in a public arena.

**Q: What are the challenges in talking about these issues to a Latin American or Spanish-speaking audience?**

**A:** There are always many challenges when communicating about sensitive subjects such as population. There are still people in South America, as there are everywhere, who are in denial about overpopulation being such a serious problem. That's why we want to play our part in educating and informing people, to open up the debate – and to help people realise that this is a real issue that cannot be denied or ignored.

**Q: Can you tell us about the media coverage you got for us on World Population Day?**

**A:** We were able to partner with the most important media agency in Argentina, which got us great interviews and resulted in coverage in a wide range of media outlets. Based on our experience, we believe that this could be replayed in other countries by teaming up with the right partners.

**Q: How important is it to reach those who don't speak English?**

**A:** It's essential if we are to expand the work of Population Matters across the globe. I hope that other countries will join us and set up social media channels to communicate with local populations – it's the best way to engage with people and get them talking about the issues that affect each and every one of us. It would be great to see Population Matters ambassadors in every country to spread the message that our population is so large that the Earth simply cannot cope and our most significant environmental problems are all made worse by our ever-increasing numbers.



## HABLO ESPAÑOL?

- Spanish is the primary language in 20 countries
- There are around 460 million native Spanish speakers, making it the second most spoken language in the world after Chinese
- Mexico (128 million) is the most populous Spanish-speaking country in the world, followed by Colombia (50 million) and Argentina (45 million)

## HELP US REACH MORE PEOPLE

Please follow us on social media and share our content. If you know Spanish-speaking people, tell them about [facebook.com/populationmattersespanol](https://facebook.com/populationmattersespanol)

From coercion to education, writer and activist **Mari Thekaekara** recalls her experiences of India's population drive over the decades.

# Lessons from India

**Population control** has been a huge priority on India's policy list since Independence in 1947. We were a country ravaged by colonisation, famines, droughts and floods. As a child, I have vivid memories of school fundraising relief drives to help people, especially in the neighbouring state of Bihar. Many decades later, the issue of India's population – and how to feed its people – continues to spark debate.

Practically every summer, heart-breaking images of parched, cracked fields and crops damaged by the relentless summer sun appeared. Then the monsoon arrived in June. And devastating floods followed. The cruel cycle continues 50 odd years later.

Left wing population theorists say population is not the problem, equitable distribution is. After all, rats feast on godowns (warehouses) bursting with grain. Rice and wheat rot while poor people starve. We are coming close to 75 years of Independence, yet no government has succeeded in stemming starvation and malnutrition deaths. The malnutrition numbers are fudged often, so as not to give a bad name to the regime, every regime, in power.

## THE INFAMOUS EMERGENCY

The right wingers still talk about controlling population, despite its troubled history – an outrage which must not be forgotten. At the height of India's infamous 'Emergency' in the mid '70s, there was a forced population curtailment effort. The nation's poorest men, such as rickshaw pullers and pavement dwellers, were rounded up by police vans, taken to hospitals and forcibly sterilised. In return for undergoing the dreaded vasectomy operation, they were gifted a transistor

– a huge luxury for those in abject poverty. The ubiquitous transistor was the butt of many jokes – as were the hapless men who underwent the vasectomy.

Government employees were coerced into bringing in people to sterilisation centres. If they didn't, financial incentives and promotions were held back. Vans went around with government doctors sterilising or botching up operations. Quacks jumped on the bandwagon. This had far-reaching implications though. If an unsuccessful vasectomy failed and the woman became pregnant, she was accused of adultery. The men felt vasectomies diminished their masculinity in the eyes of their friends. So, a host of mental health issues followed. The resultant alcoholism often led to domestic violence.

Through the 1960s, there was a new wave of education missions including government-led initiatives including the ubiquitous inverted triangle, the family planning symbol, with slogans shouting: 'We two, our two'. Before every film in movie theatres there was a government documentary which showed a short film, inciting people that bliss was the two-child norm. Buses and public transport always carried the two-child family symbol and slogan – a rural man and woman with two smiling kids. All family planning aid from condoms to IUDs to abortions were free. Talking openly about contraception became a normal part of life.

“One thing that's certain is that with education, family size drops without coercion.”

## CULTURE AND CLASS

Today, things in India have changed a lot for the better, particularly in the South – although there are still many challenges in terms of addressing poverty and improving education provision for girls throughout the rest of the country. One thing that's certain is that with education, family size drops without coercion. Middle class families with aspirations rarely have more than two kids. Kerala, with 100% literacy and the most educated women in the country, clearly highlights this. Young urban couples where both parents work are increasingly opting for a one child family.

While this is undoubtedly a positive step forward, education does not mean the woman's decision-making role is strong. Culture and class bring in different dynamics. Too many Indian women still don't get to decide how many children they have and must be empowered to say they don't want to have more kids. In India, the preference for the male child may lead to a totally different scenario a few decades from now. But that, of course, is an entirely different story.

**Mari Thekaekara** is a human rights activist and writer based in Gudalur, Tamil Nadu. She is president of the Nilgiris chapter All India Women's Conference. In 1985 she co-founded Accord to work with India's disadvantaged Adivasi tribal people.



© Yogendra Singh/Unsplash



# Responding to a health emergency in Kenya

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities across the globe. Thanks to your support, PM's Empower to Plan crowdfunding initiative has been able to offer help and support, reports PM's **Kat Dixon**.

**The repercussions** of the spread of COVID-19 have been felt in all parts of the world. With more than one billion people already without access to local healthcare across the globe, existing inequalities within and between countries have increased – and the effect on women and girls has been devastating, even in developed nations such as the UK and USA.

In the UK, rates of domestic violence have risen. Just three weeks into lockdown, the number of calls to the National Domestic Abuse helpline run by Refuge was 49% higher than normal. Women have also struggled to access emergency contraception and safe abortion services. Many women in the US already live in so-called 'abortion deserts' where they must travel more than 100 miles to access their nearest clinic.

In places such as Africa, the impact is devastating. Wendo Aszed, the founder and Executive Director of Empower to Plan partner Dandelion Africa, reveals: "COVID-19 has significantly affected our work in rural marginalised areas. With schools closed and most families unable to afford basic needs, girls are vulnerable to sexual abuse, unintended pregnancies and domestic violence. Due to social distancing, we are unable to hold our Mobile Outreaches that take reproductive health to people in hard to reach areas. Over 10,000 women who depend on our services are susceptible to unintended pregnancies due to lack of access."

## DESPERATION AND INSPIRATION

At the beginning of the outbreak, our thoughts went to the communities in Kenya. Kibra, one of Africa's largest slums, was visited last year by PM's Director Robin Maynard and Campaigns & Project Officer, Florence Blondel, during their trip for the Nairobi Summit on International Conference on Population and Development

(ICPD25). Robin and Florence heard about the challenges facing young women and met one who was forced to turn to prostitution to support her family. Without contraception, she relied on unsafe, backstreet abortions.

Robin and Florence were inspired by the girls there, who expressed their desire to stay in school, delay pregnancy until they had chosen the right time and acknowledged that having unintended larger families could prevent work and future opportunities. In the rural areas near Tsavo National Park, women farming the land understood the relationship between population and climate change, having experienced first-hand the shift in the seasonal rains relied on for growing their crops.

During the trip, Florence also met Brian Omariba, the founder of Ghettoh Clean Youth Group in Kibra slum. Following their return, Florence was then introduced to Frederick Okinda, the founder of KOMB GREEN Solutions, located in the nearby Korogocho slum. These community-led groups work to transform the lives of local people through conservation work, as well as the delivery of family planning services. KOMB GREEN Solutions had been successful in clearing waste from Nairobi river, while Ghettoh Clean had launched its own solid waste management programme, collecting and disposing of waste from households and on the streets of Kibra.

**500 million**

Women and girls lack adequate facilities for menstrual hygiene management

Source UN

**232 million**

Women and girls do not have the choice and ability to access safe family planning and abortion services

Source UN

**3 billion**

The number of people who do not have handwashing facilities at home – that's 40% of the global population

Source UN

## EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Resources in the slums are scarce. Although hand hygiene and sanitation is crucial in preventing the spread of coronavirus there is limited access to water and sanitation amenities. Our concerns were worryingly clear: how could the spread of a contagious, life threatening virus be contained, and how could the consequences be lessened? How could we help these communities? We subsequently



© Florence Blondel



launched two COVID-19 emergency response Empower to Plan crowdfunding projects. Thanks to the support of donors, the targets for both projects were reached in record time. Brian and Frederick were able to purchase and install tippy tanks (a hands-free hand washing device, operated by a foot lever), soap, personal protective equipment (PPE) as well as having the means to provide a small daily payment to the volunteers overseeing the proper use of the new facilities. Alongside this, to offset the shortage of contraceptives available as a result of the pandemic, a delivery of 6,500 condoms was made by DKT International Kenya, to be distributed at handwashing points.

### DECREASING OPTIONS

The small act of providing easy access to condoms is vital. As healthcare resources have been re-allocated in response to the pandemic, the options available to women and girls have decreased ever further. Facing economic uncertainty, families are more likely to resort to child marriage, while girls are more likely to be taken out of school to help with increased care and domestic work. Gender-based violence, rape, early and unintended pregnancies, and maternal mortality all increase as a result.

Kenya-based Monique Oliff, who has worked in international healthcare for more than two decades, reports: “There are so many people in need right now and we are involved in supporting as many as we can here in our community, but our biggest concern is around all the children who are out of school now and the alarming rise in teenage pregnancies. All our children and particularly our girls are once again unfairly getting the raw end of a global crisis.”

### UNCERTAIN TIMES

Unfortunately, as the health crisis continues, the people in Kibra face ongoing uncertainties, as Brian Omariba explains: “There has been a worrying rise in coronavirus cases in Nairobi. People have been losing their livelihoods and their homes.” Brian himself has struggled to support his family as the pandemic has forced the closure of his small milk business. With no sign of coronavirus cases abating in the region (28,104 confirmed cases at the time of writing, with a daily peak seen at the end of July),

“Thanks to the support of donors, the targets were reached in record time.”

and the pressure on health care services mounting, emergency supplies are running out. As a result of the continued challenges, Population Matters set up a [second emergency crowdfunding project](#). This funding boost will ensure that the new facilities and the distribution of condoms can be maintained.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a deep shock to societies around the world, exposing and putting further pressure on issues of poverty and existing inequalities. The rights of people, especially women and girls, must be safeguarded and put at the centre of recovery. The two rapid response projects launched this year were unique for Empower to Plan, and thanks to our supporters, have given hope to our friends in Kenya.

## MORE ABOUT EMPOWER TO PLAN



Population Matters' Empower to Plan initiative supports small grassroots NGOs in empowering girls, women and communities through the delivery of family planning and environmental conservation services, using the power of crowdfunding. Through generous donations from supporters, Empower to Plan has helped organisations such as Dandelion Africa, which works to provide holistic economic, educational and Sexual and Reproduction Health (SRH) solutions for women and young people in Kenya, and You Before Two, a small charity that provides sex education to children in the north of England.

To find out more, visit [populationmatters.org/empower-to-plan](https://populationmatters.org/empower-to-plan). You can also send a cheque payable to Population Matters to Population Matters, 135-137 Station Road, London E4 6AG writing the name of which project you would like to support on the back.

# Addressing population opens many opportunities to improve lives, to advance social justice and to invest in people

PM's Director **Robin Maynard** in conversation with **Laurel Hanscom**, CEO of the Global Footprint Network.



**Robin Maynard:** The Global Footprint Network has just marked Earth Overshoot Day 2020. What were the most significant findings this year? Was the event picked up by the media?

**Laurel Hanscom:** For the first time ever, Earth Overshoot Day moved back by over three weeks. The date has moved back a few times before, but never this significantly. Under very different circumstances, this would be something to celebrate. Unfortunately, the shift has come at a huge cost to life and livelihoods. We were therefore uncertain whether there would be any reporting on Earth Overshoot Day, given everything else going on this year. Nevertheless, we found that many people were curious about how COVID-19 and the subsequent shutdowns delayed the date. In fact, we managed to garner a fair bit of publicity – even catching the attention of France's President Emmanuel Macron who tweeted about it.

**Earth Overshoot Day** marks the date when humanity's demand for ecological resources and services in a given year exceeds what the Earth can regenerate in that year. In 2020, it landed on 22 August, more than three weeks later than the previous year. The global economic downturn caused by the devastating effect of the coronavirus pandemic has caused humanity's ecological footprint to contract. However, true sustainability that allows all people and life on Earth to thrive can and should only be achieved by positive design, not through disaster.



**RM:** What are the key messages that you wanted to get across in 2020?

**LH:** We've identified five, interconnected 'solution pillars' that define long-term trends: Planet (how we can help nature thrive), Cities (how we design and manage cities), Energy (how we power ourselves), Food (how we produce, distribute and consume food) and Population (how many of us there are). All are – and can be – shaped by both our individual and collective choices

In addition to the five pillars, one key message from the campaign this year is that you don't need to wait for others to take steps to #MoveTheDate. In the absence of global agreement and cooperation, preparing your own family, community or company for the predictable future of climate change and resource constraints is becoming even more essential. Personally, I find it is an empowering message that you can take action yourself – what you do is not contingent on everyone else. We can turn around natural resource consumption trends while improving the quality of life for all people.

For several years now, we have intentionally framed the campaign around inspiring people to #MoveTheDate of Earth Overshoot Day. We are in overshoot. That is just data. Rather than dwelling on that reality, however, we focus on existing solutions and the many ways we can work together to make positive change. Not only that, we are showing how living within the means of what nature provides is more than just a nice sentiment – it is a competitive advantage as we move into a fossil fuel-free economy.

To highlight how, the global launch of Earth Overshoot Day 2020 was hosted by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the University of Glasgow – as a way to give uplift to COP26 (in addition to a pre-launch with the Club of Rome). The world launch in Scotland was opened by the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Roseanna Cunningham MSP, with testimonials from Nigel Topping, the UK's High Level Climate Action Champion, and COP25 President Carolina Schmidt. We've also produced an ebook with Schneider Electric, which argues that enabling humanity to thrive on our finite planet is becoming a key business strategy.



**Laurel Hanscom** is CEO of the Global Footprint Network, a research organisation focused on how the world manages its natural resources and responds to climate change. Global Footprint Network applies meaningful metrics to promote positive change in the world and searches for ways to increase the impact and relevance of Ecological Footprint research.

**RM:** It's great to see an analysis that clearly sets out the different pillars being interconnected and impacting upon each other – and that the Global Footprint Network has the courage and conviction to acknowledge and address population. How can we encourage more 'green' organisations to feel more comfortable about including population in discussions about the environment, sustainability and biodiversity?

**LH:** We absolutely acknowledge that the simple act of raising the issue of population may turn people off from the sustainability conversation altogether. It's an incredibly sensitive and complex matter, full of taboos and prejudices. At the same time, avoiding the population conversation does nothing to address one of the most significant contributors to humanity's increasing demand on the planet. It was exactly for this reason that we tried something new this year, asking the simple question: *should we even be talking about population?* We invited folks from around the world to contribute their perspectives. The result was an incredible mosaic of pros and cons, overwhelmingly highlighting the advantages and benefits of including population in the discussion.

There are so many positive solutions and great opportunities to highlight the intersection of human rights, public health and sustainability – and there are two organisations in the environmental/climate sphere that have addressed population really well. Project Drawdown has modelled the influence of universal education and family planning, thereby quantifying the power of rights-based solutions in our fight against climate change. Also, the Center for Biological Diversity's Endangered Species Condoms project that connects population to biodiversity – I love the clever way they are normalising the conversation through humour.

**RM:** How do you feel the blocks and barriers that obstruct more action being taken to tackle population can be overcome in a positive way?

**LH:** Our message is that each of the five pillars is an opportunity to invest in a world that works for all. Accordingly, we want to show that addressing population

opens many opportunities to improve lives, to advance social justice, and to invest in people, particularly those who have been marginalised. So how do we move past the barriers? Inclusion, reflection, and data. Inclusion of diverse voices, leaders, and geographies. Reflection on the history that shapes our current landscape. Data that allows us to assess the extent of our resource consumption. By our calculations, if every other family had one fewer child and motherhood was postponed by two years, by 2050, we would move Earth Overshoot Day by 49 days.

**RM:** Are there any positives coming out of the devastating effect of COVID-19? Could this global pandemic bring about a change to the way people feel about the planet – almost a Blue Planet/plastics moment?

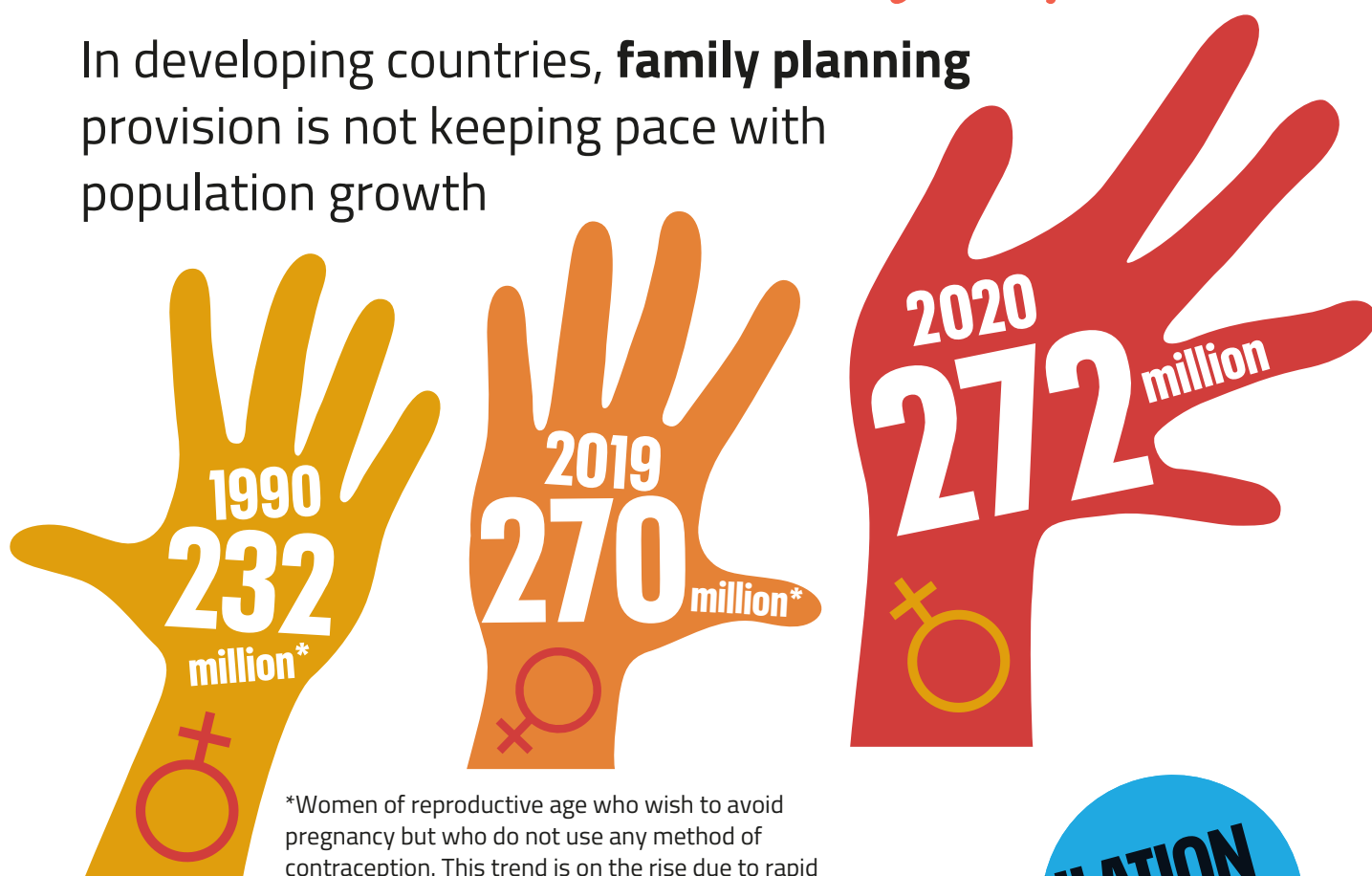
**LH:** There definitely seems to be a new awareness. Because everyone on the planet has been affected by the pandemic, people are far more aware of our interconnectedness – not just with each other, but with the Earth and the other species with whom we share it. The pandemic has made it even more obvious how population growth factors into the intersection of biodiversity loss and public health. We have seen that widespread change in a short amount of time is possible. And the experience has demonstrated that if we protect ourselves, we protect others at the same time. Let's apply this wisdom more broadly. Let's not allow the loss we have experienced to have been in vain.

**RM:** Finally, you've agreed to join PM's Expert Advisory Group – which we're very grateful for. It's been good to work more closely with the Global Footprint Network during both our World Population Day events and Earth Overshoot Day. What are your hopes and ambitions for our ongoing collaboration?

**LH:** I'm looking forward to learning more about PM's work and finding ways to support one another. I believe there are always more ways to strengthen your communication by including additional Ecological Footprint data. The sustainability movement is an ecosystem and we each have our role in it – I'm glad for the opportunity to do some cross-pollinating. I want to applaud the team at PM for taking on a sticky, but important topic. It's not lost on me that great care has been taken to put empowerment and choice at the centre of all your efforts. I think there are always improvements that can be made in the way we engage with the topic – especially in the way we respond to detractors and where we form alliances. Continuing to increase the diversity of partners and ambassadors, as you clearly are, will support all aspects of the PM mission.



In developing countries, **family planning** provision is not keeping pace with population growth



\*Women of reproductive age who wish to avoid pregnancy but who do not use any method of contraception. This trend is on the rise due to rapid population growth and slow progress in improving access.

