

POPULATION MATTERS

Issue 38 Spring 2021 | 30th anniversary edition

30 years to save the world

Every choice we make and each
action we take will have an impact

It's not too late

Jonathon Porritt – as much of
an activist as he ever was

Facing the future

Chris Packham and Megan McCubbin on
our chance to rebuild a post-pandemic
world that's better for people and planet



ISSN 2053-0412 (Print) ISSN 2053-0420 (Online)

#MAKEITPOSSIBLE

Contents

About us

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.

Population Matters is a registered charity in England and Wales (1114109) and a company limited by guarantee in England (3019081) registered address 135-137 Station Road, London, E4 6AG. Population Matters is the working name of the Optimum Population Trust Registered trademark.

Magazine

Printed in the UK by Jamm Print & Productions using vegetable-based inks on 100% recycled paper.

Design, infographics & illustrations: Miller Design

Editor: Anna Harris

Cover image: Tom Gilks/BBC Wildlife Magazine

Population Matters Magazine is produced twice a year by Population Matters, 135-137 Station Road, London E4 6AG

Registered charity: 1114109 Tel: 020 8123 9116
For further information, e-versions and back copies log onto populationmatters.org/members-magazine

Stay connected

populationmatters.org

[PopulationMatters](https://www.facebook.com/PopulationMatters)

[PopnMatters](https://twitter.com/PopnMatters)

[popnmatters](https://www.instagram.com/popnmatters)

[PopulationMatters](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqWz8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8)

t: 020 8123 9116

e: enquiries@populationmatters.org

e: magazine.editor@populationmatters.org

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

WORLD
POPULATION
THIS ISSUE:
7,857,422,900

WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED READING
THIS MAGAZINE PLEASE RECYCLE IT
BY PASSING IT ON

3 From the Director

Robin Maynard looks at how, from a meeting of interested parties three decades ago, Population Matters has grown to become a small but mighty charity that's taking on the immense challenges of the future.

4 News round-up

Population news stories, PM poll results and Endgame 2050.

6 Going nowhere fast

How population growth is holding back efforts to tackle climate change.

7 Can economists save the planet?

The Dasgupta Review challenges the way economic success is measured and asks for transformative change. Plus, news of PM's 2021 Conference.

8 The campaigning generation

PM's President Jonathon Porritt is put in the hotseat by PM activist Stella Wright.

10 Pullout poster – 30 years to save the world

To commemorate 30 years of Population Matters, here are 10 facts, 10 actions and 10 possible outcomes that could see us heading towards 2050 with hope.

13 Want change? Take action!

Conservationists Chris Packham and Megan McCubbin share their thoughts on building a positive post-pandemic future.

14 One team for the planet

It's time for the environmental community to come together to address our environmental crises, urges PM's Olivia Nater.

15 A sustainable future

Dr Yasmeen Sabeeh Qazi looks at the opportunities arising from Pakistan's demographic transition if the potential of the country's women and girls is harnessed.

16 Transforming lives

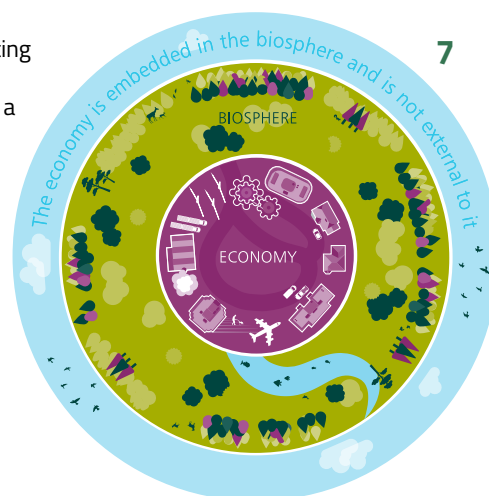
An update on some of PM's Empower to Plan projects in Uganda, Kenya and the UK, funded by our members.

18 Women under pressure

PM's Alistair Currie reports on the toxic mix of governments promoting population growth and restricting women's rights.

19 Q&A with Alisha Graves

The newest member of PM's Expert Advisory Group on the work of OASIS, which is focused on advancing education and choice for women and girls in the Sahel.



From the Director

From a meeting in a House of Commons committee room three decades ago to a charity with global reach, our belief in positive action continues to drive us forward to face the challenges ahead.



In this, our 30th Anniversary

issue, I must firstly pay tribute to the far-sightedness of the founders of Optimum Population Trust (OPT), now known as Population Matters (PM). Issue number one of OPT's magazine, *Better World*, was published in January 1993, a little under two years after, as that first issue phrased it, "*OPT was conceived, if readers will pardon the word, in a committee room of the House of Commons on March 21, 1991*". The occasion was marked by a debate on population. Four months later on 24 July, a little after its first trimester, at a meeting in a London language school, with David Willey (who, dedicated to the cause, continued to lead and inspire OPT until his death in 2000), his wife Yvette Willey, David Richardson and others in attendance, the Optimum Population Trust was born.

A lot has happened over the past three decades, with Population Matters finally achieving charitable status in 2006, enhancing its ability to increase members and finances and transition from being dependent entirely on volunteers to an organisation employing full-time staff.

Today, team members, our researchers and consultants are actively working for PM in the UK, France, Africa, Australia and the US. Our Patrons and Expert Advisory Group members include internationally recognised academics, broadcasters (if one can describe Sir David Attenborough as merely a 'broadcaster'), campaigners, conservationists, scientists and women's empowerment and rights

“Today, our researchers and consultants are working in the UK, France, Africa, Australia and the US. Our Patrons and Expert Advisory Group members include academics, broadcasters, conservationists, scientists and women's empowerment activists. PM supporters number more than 20,000 from 120 countries.”

activists from across the world. PM supporters number more than 20,000 from 120 countries worldwide.

There's consistency and continuity too: our overall objective can still be summed up as seeking to achieve a 'Better World'. However, to quote Professor Alok Ranjan Chaurasia, 30 years on there's still, "*a conspicuous silence about the role of population in the debate on environmental sustainability*". Mainstream environmental groups Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and the RSPB remain reluctant to promote positive action on population, despite the growing body of science linking biodiversity loss and climate change to human population impacts. Professor

Chaurasia's research, published in our *Journal of Population and Sustainability*, reveals that ongoing population growth is overwhelming reductions in carbon emissions achieved through energy efficiency. Similarly, as highlighted on page 14, the shift by millions of people to plant-based diets and the consequent eco-benefits are outstripped by increasing population and consumption.

Despite such contradictions, despite the science, optimism and the belief in positive action motivates us and our supporters, as they did the founders of the Optimum Population Trust.

HOPE RISING

Optimism spans the decades, inspiring a new generation of campaigners. Our President, Jonathon Porritt, sees hope rising out of the "*intergenerational rage*" of the third of the world's population under 18 who must contend with worsening ecological challenges, but whose rage can fuel greater activism. Similarly, our Patron Chris Packham laments the "*unexceptional leaders*" currently in power for these "*exceptional times*", whose paucity of vision leaves them blustering about 'returning to normal' and 'getting back to business', when it is 'business as normal' that has got us and our planet in this present plight. His stepdaughter, Megan McCubbin, directs her 'intergenerational rage' at clear targets and tactics: "*The new generation, when they reach positions of power, the big change will come then.*"

Population Matters continues to build on the foresight of our predecessors. Our strategy, currently undergoing review, will, emulating Megan's energy and optimism, be focused on clear targets, extending our existing global partnerships, promoting positive solutions and offering increased opportunities for more people, young and old, to be active in our ongoing campaign to build a 'Better World'.

Robin Maynard

Director, Population Matters



Population Matters news round-up

People want action on extinctions

As PM Patron Sir David Attenborough's documentaries highlight the biodiversity crisis, a PM poll shows two-thirds of people in the UK want the same or more priority on species loss as on climate change.

The poll, taken just after broadcast of Sir David's powerful *Extinction: the facts* documentary on BBC One found that 91% of respondents were concerned about biodiversity loss. And, while climate change and plastic pollution are the greatest concerns, nearly half of those polled were

"very concerned" about the loss of animal and plant species, 41% thought it should have the same priority as tackling climate change and 32% thought it should have more.

Last September, a Leaders' Pledge for Nature was announced, prior to the United Nation's biodiversity summit, committing to reverse the decline in biodiversity by 2030. The pledge was signed by the leaders of more than 60 nations. We've seen fine words and promises before and they haven't been delivered. At PM, we're pushing for



© Unsplash/Simon Greenwood

global leaders to do what they say they will this time, and that includes truly addressing the most important indirect drivers – expanding consumption and human population.



© Unsplash/Helio I'm Nik

It's now or never

An important new study warns that the world is failing to grasp the gravity of our environmental crises and that without urgent action on the underlying causes – population and consumption growth – we face a 'ghastly future' of catastrophic mass extinction, climate disruption, and human suffering.

The paper, published in *Frontiers in Conservation Science* by Corey Bradshaw, PM Patron Professor Paul Ehrlich and 15 other leading scientists, summarises more than 150 major studies on the state of our planet and predicts that future environmental conditions will be far worse than what is generally believed.

In an article for *The Conversation*, the authors state: "The problems, all tied to human consumption and population growth, will almost certainly worsen over coming

decades. The damage will be felt for centuries and threatens the survival of all species."

The report's authors suggest that the lack of urgency is down to several factors. These include the failure to connect and relay planetary crises and solutions identified by individual academics (who tend to specialise in one particular topic) in a meaningful way to policy makers and the wider audience.

[Turn to pages 10-11 for details of how we can all have a positive impact on our future >>](#)

By numbers

Biodiversity is declining faster than at any time in human history

70%

The amount that vertebrate wildlife populations have shrunk during the last 50 years*

1 million

The number of species estimated to be threatened with extinction*

50%

Agriculture occupies half of all habitable land on Earth and is the main driver of habitat and biodiversity loss**

60%

of all mammal species on the planet are farm animals**

70%

of all bird species on Earth are farmed poultry**

1/3

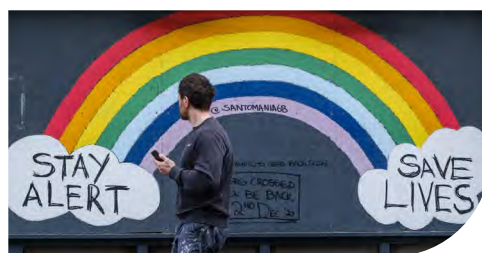
Our modern food systems are responsible for a third of all greenhouse gas emissions***

[Find out more about changing our food consumption patterns on page 14 >>](#)

COVID-19 – what lessons have we learnt?

In March 2020, as COVID-19 was revealing its deadly impact on the world, PM published a blog about the link between population growth, environmental destruction and pandemics. Since then, a major report has been published by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, summarising how our exponential rise in consumption, trade and population pressure is driving a rapid increase in the risk of pandemics, with more than five new diseases emerging every year.

PM Patron Jane Goodall stated in a recent interview: "We brought it (COVID-19) on ourselves by our disrespect of nature." UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also did



© Unsplash/Kevin Greife

not shy away from the hard truth in a recent address, but he added: "Human activities are at the root of our descent toward chaos. But that means human action can help to solve it."

[A change for the better? Chris Packham and Megan McCubbin comment on pages 12-13 >>](#)

Thumbs up from our members

© Unsplash/Jacqueline Munguia



A big thank you to everyone who took part in our first annual survey, released late last year. We heard from more than 400 members from 22 countries and it's really encouraging to find that 90% are 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied' with their experience to

date. In addition, 79% feel 'very connected' or 'somewhat connected' to the work taking place – with the top two topics most resonating with members being global population growth and that of nature and biodiversity.

In terms of member benefits, the monthly email newsletter came out on top, with this magazine being a close second! Many of you enjoy our themed talks and Q&A sessions, which we're hoping to feature more frequently as part of a growing programme of online events this year. With 94% saying they're likely to renew their membership, it's great that so many PM members will continue to support our campaigns.

© Unsplash/Danis Graves



Birth control: where are the male options?

Decades of research have led to the development of pills, injections, implants, coils, patches, rings and barriers. However, almost all of these have to be implemented by the female partner. Even today, men only have the choice between vasectomy (male sterilisation), and condoms.

Increasingly, many men wish to play a more active role in family planning. A survey by the US-based Male Contraceptive Initiative found that almost four in 10 men are very interested in potential new methods for male contraception. And, as unplanned pregnancies still account for nearly half of all pregnancies worldwide, increasing the number of options available to men could help reduce these.

Despite a lack of investment, several exciting research projects are underway, including a gel containing testosterone and a synthetic analogue of progesterone, developed by the Population Council. However, without more funding, experts say it'll take up to 20 years for new drugs to become publicly available. Nevertheless, we salute male contraceptive developers for laying the much-needed groundwork for a more equal society in which everyone is empowered to plan their family.



Can we change our ways?

"Humanity has backed itself into an ecological endgame as we approach mid-century."

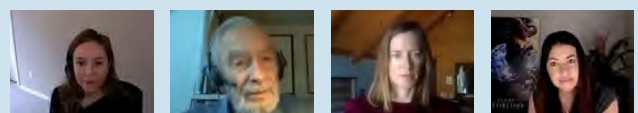
What will the future be like in the year 2050? A mere three decades away, most of us hope to still be around. So, what kind of future are we heading into? ENDGAME 2050 gives us a glimpse – and it does not look good.

In February, PM held a live screening of the population segment of this important new documentary, which is an urgent call to action to tackle the existential crises bearing down on the planet. This was followed by a panel discussion with the film-maker Sofia Pineda Ochoa – a physician-turned-environmentalist; reproductive health expert Alisha Graves; and our esteemed Patrons Professor Paul Ehrlich, renowned ecologist and author of the seminal *Population Bomb*, and Leilani Münter, environmental activist and childfree advocate.

When asked about why film can have a bigger impact on attitudes and actions than traditional campaigning, Sofia Pineda Ochoa said: "Our emotional centre has a very strong say in how we behave. Film can be visceral – tapping into our instincts and emotions in such a way that moves us to change our ways." This sentiment was echoed by Professor Ehrlich, who added: "Emotions are an incredibly important part of our lives and just telling people more science doesn't have as much impact as telling stories does."

All the panellists agreed that there was a need to talk more openly about population and that negative reactions to women who choose to have smaller families or be childfree should be challenged. Alisha Graves commented: "We need to break the silence around it." Robin Maynard added: "This documentary promotes the effective population solutions we advocate for at Population Matters, particularly the empowerment of women and girls."

Visit populationmatters.org and search for 'ENDGAME' to watch the live discussion. Read our Q&A with Alisha Graves on page 19 >>



Sofia Pineda Ochoa, Professor Paul Ehrlich, Alisha Graves and Leilani Münter taking part in the live discussion.

Climate change progress being cancelled out

Despite increased energy efficiency, a major new study finds that population growth is holding back efforts to tackle climate change.

While significant strides have been taken over the last 30 years to improve energy efficiency, which reduces both the amount of energy needed and the levels of CO₂ emitted, additional demand, caused partly by population growth, has meant that these solutions are effectively driving with the brakes on.

These are the findings of a substantial new study by Professor Aalok Ranjan Chaurasia, titled *Population effects of increase in world energy use and CO₂ emissions: 1990 - 2019*. The study examines the effects of four factors on total energy use and CO₂ emissions across 44 countries: population change, economic growth, energy intensity (the amount of energy use/production needed to achieve a certain amount of economic activity) and carbon intensity (level of emissions per unit of energy).

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IS A KEY DRIVER

The peer-reviewed research has been published in the *Journal of Population and Sustainability*, an editorially independent academic periodical published by Population Matters twice a year. It finds that globally, the growth in economic activity per person is the main driver of energy use and CO₂ emissions – in each case responsible for around twice the contribution of population growth on average. And, while economic growth has been far faster than population growth, this nevertheless demonstrates that population growth has accounted for a third of emissions during the period analysed. This means that the total amount of emissions generated by population growth is equal to two-thirds of the emissions saved through improved energy efficiency measures – essentially knocking back any positive environmental gains that have been made.

AFFLUENCE AND ENERGY

Globally, over 29 years from 1990 to 2019, we have reduced energy intensity by more than a third because fewer of the things we do require as much energy as in the past and the energy we use is produced and used more efficiently. We have also reduced the carbon intensity of that energy – we now produce a lower level of emissions for the same amount of



© Unsplash/Riccardo Annandale

energy use due to increasing cleaner energy supplies. However, as people and societies across the world become more affluent, their average economic activity grows, which pushes up energy use and carbon emissions.

INTEGRATING POPULATION IS ESSENTIAL

So, while the link with population is clear, the study's author points out that there is a distinct lack of discussion about it, stating: "There is a conspicuous silence about the role of population in the debate on environmental sustainability. For example, the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development pays only passing attention

to population related issues and concerns in the quest to secure environmental sustainability. My analysis highlights the need to integrate population as a factor in environmental sustainability. Reducing and ultimately achieving zero population growth can contribute significantly towards environmental sustainability by considerably decelerating the increase in energy use and CO₂ emissions."

Commenting on the study, PM's Director, Robin Maynard, said: "There are many drivers of climate change and all must be considered. Addressing population or any of those drivers alone will not be enough. We need radical change across the board, exercising all options

and available actions in behaviour (especially in the high-consuming Global North), policy and the economic system to achieve the targets set out in the Paris Agreement on climate change. However, this study demonstrates that if population is ignored then progress in other areas will be overwhelmed and even cancelled out. Population has to be central to the debate."

"There is a conspicuous silence about the role of population in the debate on environmental sustainability."

Professor Aalok Ranjan Chaurasia

FIND OUT MORE

You can read more about the relationship between population and climate change in our fully referenced *Population Matters Climate Change Briefing 2020*, available as a PDF at populationmatters.org/resources



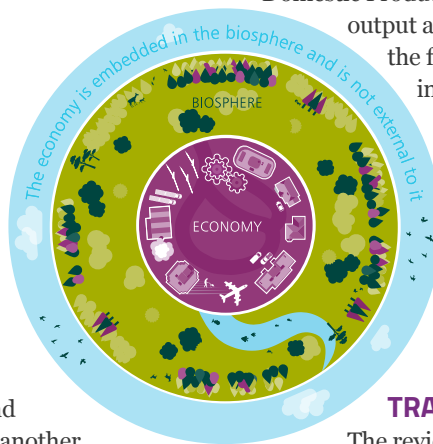
Can economists save the planet?

The environment in which we live can no longer sustain us. It's time for a paradigm shift, where success is measured in terms of thriving economies, not those in perpetual growth, argues PM's **Alistair Currie**.

For generations, economists have perceived the natural world as a source of stuff that can be bought and sold, and a plughole down which stuff that isn't needed can be thrown. Our relationship with nature has been based on the principle that it will always keep providing what we want and never stop absorbing what we don't. For thousands of years, that understanding has worked for us. However, as many economists are now recognising, that time is over, and that assumption is killing us.

LIVING IN THE SPACE BETWEEN

Among them, Kate Raworth's (senior research associate at Oxford University's Environmental Change Institute) principle of 'doughnut economics' is one that has caught the public imagination because of its simplicity. Raworth's model illustrates the idea that "a healthy economy should be designed to thrive, not grow". It represents the level of economic activity that is needed for everyone to have a decent standard and quality of life as a circle. It then imagines another concentric circle, which is the level of economic activity that exceeds what the planet can sustain. In order to ensure a decent life for everyone, without wrecking the planet, we must live in the 'doughnut', the space between those two circles. In a world in which deep poverty and inequality co-exists with an environmental crisis driven by unsustainable consumption, it's clear that our economic system is failing to achieve that.



“The economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment – not the reverse.

Herman Daly, former World Bank economist, Population Matters Expert Advisor, 1977

details how the environmental costs of economic activity are very rarely factored into the financial cost, so that the prices of goods and services don't reflect their impacts. That makes them cheaper, fostering a cycle of more consumption and more environmental damage.

Nor has conventional economics recognised the value of nature in underpinning it – the example of bees and other insects pollinating commercial crops at no cost, being the most famous. Conservative estimates put the level of government subsidies internationally which damage nature

at more than \$6 trillion – in the report's words: “paying people more to exploit Nature than to protect it”.

HOW WE MEASURE SUCCESS

The review identifies “deep-rooted, widespread institutional failure”. It also joins many progressive economists in challenging the way in which economic success is measured, both in crude terms of growth and specifically in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which measures only economic output and activity, but doesn't account for whether the fundamental “assets” underpinning it – including nature – are strong. Because of this, rising GDP conveys a sense of progress, even when the thing it depends on, the environment in which we live, is being degraded to the point where it can no longer sustain us. Effectively, future generations are subsidising our present affluence: we enjoy prosperity because we are taking what belongs to them.

TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

The review calls for three key changes:

policies which reward protecting nature; measuring “wealth” in a way that reflects people's wellbeing now and in the longer term; and reducing our demands on nature. One way it proposes to ease that pressure is steps to reduce and end population growth, through family planning and generating new expectations about family size. In recognising the need to address not just consumption behaviour but the number of consumers, the report shows courage and clear-sightedness. Some economists are calling for still more radical changes than the Dasgupta report proposes. Many, however, see no need to change at all. That is no longer an option.



THE CYCLE OF CONSUMPTION

In January, leading economist and Population Matters Patron Sir Partha Dasgupta issued a major new report, commissioned by the UK's Treasury, *The Economics of Biodiversity*, which called for “transformation” in our economic systems. It

PM CONFERENCE 2021

The economic implications of reducing and ending population growth will be the subject of Population Matters' public conference this autumn. An authoritative and diverse range of speakers will discuss the opportunities for a better economic system, and, in the face of increasing scare stories about ageing societies, explore how demographic changes which help solve our environmental crisis can also be good for people. For the first time, our conference will be available as a live, online participatory event.

To find out more and join us, either online or in London on the day, visit populationmatters.org/conference-2021



STILL HOT ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

On Population Matters' 30th anniversary, activist **Stella Wright** from our London group asks our President, **Jonathon Porritt**, some searching questions...

Stella Wright: You've been a Patron of Population Matters for more than 10 years, and a long-term campaigner surrounding population issues. Has the subject got any easier to talk about over the last decade?

Jonathon Porritt: I sometimes find it hard to explain just how different the 'population debate' today is compared to the 1970s and 1980s. The idea of talking about the long-term prospects for humankind without putting the population question at the heart of those inquiries would have been seen then as ridiculous. The combined impact of humankind on the natural world is obviously a function of how many people there are on the planet, and of how those people live their lives. Two sides of the same coin.

This changed in the 1990s. Paradoxically, the hugely important UN Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, following on directly from the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, turned out to be the high point in addressing unsustainable population growth rather than the solid foundation on which to build a global consensus around the pre-eminent importance of rights-based, progressive family planning. We simply have to rebuild that foundation.

SW: Is there a single quote, or statistic that really seems to hit home for people who are reluctant to accept population growth as a threat?

JP: Perhaps unimaginatively, I still find my fellow Patron Sir David Attenborough's quote to be the most appropriate and useful: "All our environmental problems become easier

to solve with fewer people, and harder – and ultimately impossible – to solve with ever more people." And, not surprisingly, I find myself endlessly returning to that figure of 270 million women of reproductive age who are not able to manage their own fertility. Up from 232 million in 1990.

SW: At the London Group, we're setting up a youth action group, to encourage younger people to get involved. In your experience, do younger generations tend to be more understanding and accepting of population issues?

JP: As a young activist in my 20s, back in the 1970s, population was just accepted as a critical part of the web of issues and challenges that had to be engaged with. But there was nobody at that time trying to 'de-legitimise' the debate, let alone call into question the values and political integrity of those who felt particularly strongly about population and family planning. There's far too much of that going on today, and I think that sometimes discourages young people from getting involved. As I heard rather plaintively from a young member of the Green Party in a recent Zoom session: 'I'm not sure that I want to go stumbling into the population minefield!'

SW: Do you expect population growth to one day be accepted as a widespread issue, or do you see it remaining as a controversial topic or even opinion?

JP: I fear it will never be uncontroversial. And let's be honest about part of the reason why that's so: the backstory of some population campaigning in the past is deeply regrettable. No-one can deny that there have been some



© Unsplash/Markus Spiske

repugnant, deeply authoritarian campaigns to control women's fertility (in both China and India, for example), and it's not hard to unearth racist and misogynistic individuals who weave population control into their hateful world views. But all this is so far from the kind of work done today by population advocacy organisations,

"We have to go on speaking the truth to the environment and development NGOs who will still not properly acknowledge that population growth is one of the principal drivers of both the climate and the ecological emergencies."

including Population Matters here in the UK, of which I am proud to be the President. The emphasis for NGOs operating today is on women's rights, non-coercive family planning, on the wider benefits of education for girls and of reproductive healthcare, and on ensuring that women can manage their own fertility, especially in repressive and male-dominated cultures.

SW: The majority of people would like to hope that they won't witness the serious environmental effects of a growing population and consumption in their

lifetime. But how much time do we really have before it's too late to make positive change?

JP: To a certain extent, everybody involved in the debate about climate change agrees that it's already 'too late' for some things if not for others: it's too late, for instance, to get concentrations of CO₂ in the atmosphere back to the level they were at before the Industrial Revolution. This in turn means that it's too late to avoid massive climate-induced disruption over the next few decades. There's more or less complete consensus on that score. Beyond that, many scientists now feel it's too late to restrict the average temperature increase to below 1.5°C by the end of the century, but still believe it is not too late to stay below 2°C. And that means we still have a reasonable chance of avoiding runaway climate change before things start moving so fast that there's nothing we can do about them.

SW: We know that having one fewer child is the biggest thing a person can do to lessen their impact on the planet, but is this enough? What other choices have you made in your own personal life, that you think others should also consider?

JP: It is indeed – and we need to keep spelling that out loud and clear. However this angers the growing number of pro-natalists who believe that the destiny of their country or ethnic group depends on persuading/incentivising women to have more rather than fewer children. Most pro-natalists today subscribe to right-wing, deeply intolerant and divisive views that seek to advance the interests of their own particular race/tribe/culture/people. Apart from that, in terms of our lifestyles, eat less meat, live simply, shop rarely and waste nothing.

SW: What gives you the motivation to carry on spreading the population message?

JP: Because it's so blindingly obvious! Just as we have to go on speaking the truth to those in power, so we have to go on speaking reason to all reasonable and caring people – as articulated so eloquently in the 2017 Scientists' Warning to Humanity. And we have to do that especially to the significant number of environment and development NGOs in the West who will still not properly acknowledge that



STELLA WRIGHT is a member of the Population Matters London Group. Already aware of how everyone's life choices impact on the planet, she decided to attend PM's 2019 annual conference, which she calls a 'light bulb moment': "I realised the biggest way I could reduce my impact on the planet and make it a better place for future generations was to have fewer or no children and encourage and empower others to do the same. Since then, I've spent my free time volunteering for Population Matters with the London group, working on the social media channels as well as playing an active role in the committee and attending events to champion better choices." You can read Stella's blog on championing better choices at populationmatters.org.

JONATHON PORRITT CBE is a leading environmental campaigner, who headed up Friends of the Earth from 1984–90 during some of its most effective campaigning around nuclear power, tropical deforestation, and food and farming issues. Prior to that he was co-chair of the Green Party. In 1996, he established Forum for the Future, now the UK's leading sustainable development charity working to achieve practical solutions in partnership with proactive businesses, policymakers and the voluntary sector. Throughout his career, he has championed the case for addressing human population as the ultimate, underpinning sustainability issue and is currently President of Population Matters. Find out more about his latest book, *Hope in hell: A decade to confront the climate emergency*, at jonathonporritt.com.



population growth is one of the principal drivers of both the climate and the ecological emergencies.

SW: What would you say to the current generation about the importance of continuing to campaign for change? Do you think we should be even more radical and vocal than even your generation?

JP: I feel really bad that this burden now rests on the shoulders of so many young people today, and that so many feel understandable anger that it should have come to this – that our generation should have been so woefully neglectful in addressing these priorities. So what happened in 2019, with schoolchildren going on strike and the explosion of young climate activist voices in our midst, was enormously important. I see no reason why the anger of young people will not continue to grow and grow as the full extent of our betrayal of them is revealed. Nearly 30% of today's global population is under the age of 18, increasingly well-informed about climate change, increasingly connected through the internet. The phenomenon

of 'intergenerational rage' will become one of the most significant factors of the next decade, not least as that kind of rage will be so important in sustaining young people's hopes.

SW: After such a long career as an activist, do you feel just as driven as you always have?

JP: I do indeed!

**CAMPAIGN
WITH US
NOW**



As one of the key organisations that focuses on urgently needed ethical and empowering solutions to the population issue and their implementation, we need your help. Find out more about supporting our vision of a future in which our population co-exists in harmony with nature and prospers on a healthy planet, to the benefit of all at populationmatters.org/campaigns.

GLOBAL VOICES

VITAL CHOICES

On Population Matters' 30th anniversary we're asking all our supporters to make a commitment towards working together for a better, brighter future for people and planet.

Every choice you make and each action that you take can and will have an impact.



#MAKEITPOSSIBLE



TM

10 FACTS



Globally, almost half of pregnancies are unplanned.

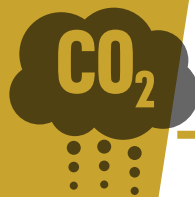
Source: Guttmacher Institute

Major environmental charities such as WWF, Friends of the Earth and the RSPB don't currently promote actions to address population growth. PM is the only organisation focusing on ethical solutions to the population issue.



On average, people in the UK are responsible for 11 times the CO₂ emissions of someone in Nigeria. Global net human-caused emissions of CO₂ need to fall by 45% from 2010 levels by 2030, to reach 'net zero' by 2050.

Sources: Global Carbon Atlas, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change



80% of biodiversity loss is caused by agriculture and 80% of agricultural land is used for livestock.

Source: UN Environment Programme



Gender equality reduces population growth: empowered women normally choose smaller families.

Humanity is currently using 70% more of the Earth's renewable resources than it can regenerate.

Source: Global Footprint Network



Childfree people and those with small families still face criticism, stigma and intrusive questioning.



The population of the Least Developed Countries is projected to rise from just over 1bn in 2020 to 1.9bn in 2050.

Source: United Nations Population Division

Only 5% of income gains from Gross Domestic Product growth go to the world's poorest 60%.

Source: Jason Hickel



Policies to address population are not yet included in major environmental agreements such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and Convention on Biodiversity.



10 ACTIONS

10 OUTCOMES

Practise safe sex. Put pressure on global leaders to support family planning and help end the unmet need of 270 million women.



Unwanted pregnancies will be reduced and improved child and maternal health provision will be established on a global scale.



Become a member of Population Matters and encourage others to join, support our campaigns and help us raise awareness of the population issue, which is contributing to almost all of the major problems facing us today.



Other environmental and conservation charities start promoting ethical population solutions to tackle our environmental crisis.



Take a transport challenge – drive less, bike, hike, use public transport, go flight-free.



Personal CO₂ emissions are slashed, helping other climate solutions be more effective. There are far fewer cars, cities have adapted to be more pedestrian and bike friendly, with more green spaces and rooftops hosting solar panels, plants and vegetable gardens.



Take a diet challenge such as Veganuary to reduce your intake of meat and dairy products. Choose organic and local foods. Plan meals to reduce food waste.



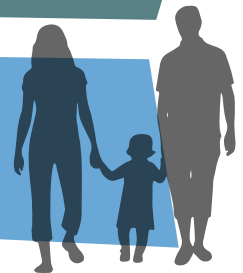
Transformative changes to our global food patterns with a shift from industrial agriculture and much less dependency on meat-heavy diets will preserve biodiversity and reduce the chance of zoonotic diseases such as COVID-19 developing.



Volunteer for or support a women's rights charity. Find out more about PM's Empower to Plan projects that support small grassroots NGOs in empowering girls, women and communities through the delivery of family planning and environmental conservation services, using the power of crowdfunding.



Increased awareness around the key issues will lead to greater women's empowerment, smaller families, better lives and a healthier planet.



Reduce, reuse, recycle. Buy less.



Reducing personal footprints inspires those around you to make positive choices. Politicians recognise there is genuine concern about the environmental impact of consumption and are taking action.



Celebrate small families, only children, and those who choose to be childfree. Engage in discussions about why these are positive choices.

Choosing to have smaller families or be childfree is normalised.



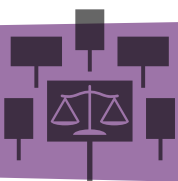
Seek out, learn from and amplify the voices and experiences of people in the Global South.



Shared understanding and respect for the challenges faced by people everywhere. Collaboration across the world promotes sustainable solutions.



Support campaigns for global justice.



The economy is focused on sustainability and wellbeing, not growth, to alleviate poverty and move towards global equality.



Campaign! Understand the issues, bust the myths, take action, sign petitions, add your voice as a campaigner for positive change that benefits people and planet.



There is government-level support and cooperation to work together on an international level so that a sustainable population co-exists in harmony with nature and prospers on a healthy planet, to the benefit of all.



WHY WE MUST SEIZE THIS CHANCE FO

© Tom Gilks/BBC Wildlife Magazine



If we've learnt anything from the devastating impact of COVID-19, it's that life will never be quite the same again, which, according to conservationists **Chris Packham** and **Megan McCubbin**, opens up a whole world of opportunity – if we're brave enough to stand up for change. Here, they share their thoughts on what needs to be done, right here, right now...

CHRIS: For me, being isolated during the global pandemic hasn't been a problem. I've found it invigorating, reaffirming and re-energising to spend time with nature in my own personal oasis. But, looking outwards, I've watched a world in turmoil, fear, frustration and distress. It looked like an experiment to test us, to see what we're made of.

We came out of it brilliantly. Scientists took action, using the latest technologies to create a vaccine to beat the disease and a means of administering it. This demonstrates that when the human race is put under pressure and gets the world's best scientists on to it, no problem is ever too big for humans to solve. There are no excuses.

However, what I'd hoped is that this horrible hiatus that we brought upon ourselves would enable us to look at the things we'd done wrong and set them right. Yet, we find ourselves in exceptional

times with unexceptional leaders who lack imagination and integrity.

Despite calls that we need to 'get back to normal' and it should be 'business as usual', do we really want this when it's a bad normal and bad business? It's now clear to many people that we have a boundless opportunity to respond to this crisis in a positive way. Yet those in positions of power are still driven by this craving to get back to how things were – normal education, normal economics – they're not seeing this as a chance to change.

We've heard the warnings from climate scientists for years. Now biodiversity scientists are adding their voices. It's an urgent call that's not being listened to. Enormous damage has been done and it's scary. When we break ecology, we break it forever. But fear is incredibly important as that's what makes us get things done.

I'm confident we can find solutions. We need to look at all the issues as being interconnected – climate change, biodiversity and population are intrinsically linked. And we have to consider everyone in the world as our neighbours and work together.

The people in power are old, the structure of our institutions is outdated. Right now, we need the energy of young people who have the courage to take risks for the sake of our future and the future of our planet. The activism that has come out of the depths of COVID-19 is astonishing – Black Lives Matter, the HS2 protests, women demonstrating on Clapham Common and in Australia. People are realising that if they want things to change they have to take action – like we did when I was a young conservationist. But we failed. We just didn't fight hard enough.

We have potential solutions to our problems, although we're not going to implement them without pain. Our job right now is to inform and stimulate

“People are realising that if they want things to change they have to take action – like we did when I was a young conservationist. But we failed. We just didn't fight hard enough.”



R CHANGE

people to have conversations so they can draw their own conclusions. If we don't talk about it we'll never see change but, ultimately, I remain hopeful.

MEGAN: Those in positions of power may give lip service to the fact that climate change is terrible, but taking action means they'll be out of pocket when they've already invested heavily in environmentally destructive schemes such as fossil fuels and HS2. Those making decision are the older generation and the full impact of climate change is not going to affect them – but it will affect their grandchildren.

In the UK, we're cushioned from the devastation of what's already happening to our planet – apart from those who've been unfortunate enough to have their homes flooded. By a fact of geography, we're not in the midst of the hurricane – Australia and California are burning, but these places are thousands of miles away from us. It's a case of out of sight, out of mind – if a threat doesn't feel real and imminent, neurologically, our brains can't compute it. When we do experience a threat first-hand, whether that be rising sea levels or food and water shortages, then we'll feel a powerful connection with the impact of climate change.

As humans, we're hardwired to find it difficult to change our minds. If someone expresses a difference in opinion we tend to see it as a personal attack. People are scared to talk about changing their behaviours and attitudes because it's difficult. But we have to change the narrative – and we can. We have to work together to reduce consumption, habitat loss and population. The media should be more honest – the amount of news dedicated to climate science is miniscule. But we can use social media as a powerful tool for storytelling, to share the important messages in an engaging way to open up that dialogue. I can already see this happening. The new generation – me and those younger than me – when they reach positions of power, the big change will come then. I also think it's important to not be scared

of the word 'activist'. You're an activist by all the actions that you do, no matter how small. You don't have to join Extinction Rebellion. You can write to your MP, sit down with your daughter and talk about the world's population issue and why empowering women and girls across the globe to be able to choose smaller families will help take the heat off the planet and reduce the pressure of human encroachment on every wildlife habitat. Whatever positive choices you make, all the small things add up to enable real, transformative change.

“People are scared to talk about changing their behaviours and attitudes because it's difficult. But we have to change the narrative to reduce consumption, habitat loss and population – and we can.”



YOU CAN MAKE A BETTER FUTURE POSSIBLE

This year marks Population Matters 30th anniversary and the 30-year countdown to 2050 – a significant milestone for reshaping our relationship with Earth by mid-century before it's too late.

You can help us accelerate our campaigns and inspire essential action by making a donation of £30 (or any amount you can spare) to enable us to elevate our message of empowerment and choice-based solutions as being the key to all our futures.

We promise to use your contribution to campaign for a better future in harmony with nature. We promise to continue empowering women and girls across the world to choose their family size. We promise to lobby policymakers worldwide to ensure population is included in environmental strategies.

Please give whatever you can to our **30th anniversary appeal** today at: populationmatters.org/30-years or send a cheque to: **Freepost POPULATION MATTERS.**

Chris Packham is one of the UK's leading naturalists and wildlife TV presenters and Patron of Population Matters. In October 2016, he earned the Christopher Parsons Award for Outstanding Achievement in recognition of his significant contribution to wildlife filmmaking, conservation and the public's understanding of the environment. **Megan McCubbin** is a zoologist, wildlife TV presenter, conservationist and photographer and is the founder of The Self-Isolating Bird Club on Twitter. The duo have been inspired to write a book together – *Back to Nature: How to Love Life – and Save It*, published by Two Roads and available via chrispackham.co.uk.



Why our planet needs us to all be on the same team

What's the most environmentally damaging industry? The energy sector? Construction? It's actually modern agriculture, explains PM's **Olivia Nater**, and our choices can change things.



© Unsplash/Jonathan Kemper

To truly achieve sustainability, our choices – whether related to family planning or diets – matter, which is why we need to reach across the table to everyone – from population activists to vegan campaigners – who is concerned about the future of our world. There's no denying the science – a growing number of reports are calling for transformative changes to our global food systems because the way we produce, consume, process and distribute food is wrecking our planet.

Unsurprisingly, many scientific authorities are urging a global shift towards more plant-based diets. In developing countries, many people rely on meat as their only source of protein, but most of us living in wealthy countries are able to reduce or eliminate our meat and dairy intake without any ill health effects. A University of Oxford study found that with the growing calorie demands of a population approaching 10 billion by mid-century, beef and milk consumption in western countries would need to fall by 90% and 60%, respectively, to limit global climate warming to 2°C.

Philip Lymbery, Global CEO of farm animal welfare charity, Compassion in World Farming International, is keen to see a shift from industrial agriculture with much less dependency on meat-heavy diets. He says: "We see the role for regenerative farming in rebooting tired soils – needed for plant-based foods – and bringing back nature. We see the need for a radical reduction in the number of animals farmed (reduce by more than half), introducing mixed, rotational farming

systems and increasing the proportion of protein we eat from plant sources."

MEAT PRODUCTION RISING

However, despite the positive intention, the facts reveal we're heading in completely the wrong direction. Long-time vegan Sofia Pineda Ochoa – a physician-turned-environmentalist – admits that the recent rise in veganism seemed to indicate a positive step forward: "Ditching animal foods was going mainstream. Famous athletes were going vegan. Documentaries on Netflix were promoting veganism. Popular vegan influencers were popping up and even McDonalds and Starbucks were offering vegan options. But then I read a UN report projecting that, in just 10 years, chicken meat and dairy consumption would increase by 20%, and beef and pig meat would increase by 14%. How could this be? It turns out that population growth and rising affluence are outpacing the growth of diet changes, so in the end, the number of animals used for food is

not decreasing at all. It's not even staying even. It's actually increasing – and by a lot."

Just as some vegans aren't aware that we can and should be doing something

about population, some population activists don't realise that ending population growth alone, although key, will not solve our environmental crises. Even if we achieve the UN's low projection of 7.3 billion people by 2100, our current

food system would continue to trash the planet. We zoomed past 7.3 billion back in 2016 and the human enterprise was not much more sustainable then, or even 10 or 15 years ago.

ADDRESSING ALL THE ISSUES

Dr Ochoa believes the time has come for everyone to face up to reality: "We owe it to the animals, the planet, and ourselves to be honest about this situation – that humans are continuing to breed and kill ever more billions of animals for food. We cannot help the situation unless we address all the issues driving this trend in the wrong direction. Our relentless growth is affecting wild animals in countless ways too – from our plastic waste that fills whales' stomachs, to destroying habitats for ever more production of palm oil and cacao. That's why, in addition to raising awareness about the impact of animal agriculture and promoting plant-based diets, I've shifted my activism to also address our unsustainable human population growth. It's pretty self-evident that we need to address both."

While we set in motion urgently needed, empowering population solutions which take decades to come into effect, we cannot ignore the readily available actions to shrink humanity's massive footprint. It's time for the environmental community to move past silo thinking and acknowledge the whole smorgasbord of solutions. We all share the same values of respect and compassion and a powerful desire to reduce suffering and build a happier, healthier world. Let's assume responsibility for the things we can control, such as personal family size and what we eat, and join together in our campaigning efforts for a better future for people, animals and nature.

It's time for the environmental community to move past silo thinking and acknowledge the whole smorgasbord of solutions.

By investing in women and girls, we'll all have the chance of achieving a sustainable future, writes **Dr Yasmeen Sabeeh Qazi**.



Women's rights key to slowing population growth – a message to world leaders

'Women hold up half the sky', reads an old Chinese saying. Indeed, women have traditionally been the world's farmers, child-bearers, and caretakers – the backbone of families and societies. And yet, girls and women continue to suffer from gender discrimination in much of the world. This second-class citizenship is detrimental first and foremost to the wellbeing of women themselves and is also a major obstacle to advancing economic development, reducing poverty and achieving environmentally sustainable societies.

Over the last half century, we've learned that the best way to slow population growth is not through coercive 'population control', but by ensuring that all people are able to make real choices about childbearing.

Let everyone, especially girls and women, have the right to choose and decide about their education, marriage, family size and employment.

LOW STATUS, HIGH FERTILITY

Women's rights are key. Fertility rates remain high where women's status is low. Fewer than one-fifth of the world's countries will account for nearly all of the world's population growth this century. Not coincidentally, those countries – the least developed nations in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and elsewhere – are also where girls are less likely to attend school, where child marriage is common, and where women lack basic rights. Pakistan is sadly one of these countries.

Yet Pakistan is at a crossroads. Data from the latest Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS) show the country has an opportunity to seize an economic boost, but only if they can accelerate fertility decline and women's

empowerment through increased access to voluntary family planning and other strategic investments.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND

The boost is known as the demographic dividend – the accelerated economic growth that results from changes to a country's age structure – namely a decrease in the share of young dependents (net consumers), relative to an expanding proportion of working-age adults (net producers). With a relative increase in the working-age population, if educated and productively employed, these changes can usher in better living standards for families, increased

production per capita, and higher rates of savings and investment.

With a population exceeding 207 million, Pakistan is slowly progressing through its demographic transition – or the movement from people living short lives and having large families to living long lives and having smaller families.

Improving access to family planning is not only important for expediting fertility decline and age structure shifts, but it's also critical for making the most of the prospects the dividend offers.

Harnessing women's potential also requires empowering women through the expansion of education and employment opportunities. Invest in girls and women and the returns will be unprecedented. Let everyone, especially girls and women, have the right to choose and decide about their education, marriage, family size and employment.

FACTS AND FIGURES

6 was the average number of children per woman in Pakistan until the 1980s. The 2017-18 PDHS revealed that although this has declined to 3.6 children, the move towards smaller families is significantly slower than in other East Asian countries at similar points in their demographic transitions.

34% of the population of Pakistan is therefore below the age of 15, distorting the country's age structure. This cohort requires significant government and household investments to fund their health, education and other consumption needs.

1 in 5 married women still have an unmet need for family planning, putting millions at risk for mistimed and unplanned pregnancies each year.

Dr Yasmeen Sabeeh Qazi has been an active advocate for women's health issues for more than 25 years. Listed in the top 100 Women Leaders in Global Health in Pakistan, she is Senior Advocacy Advisor on Family Planning for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.



Images courtesy of Pathfinder International, Pakistan

Power to the people

Empower to Plan enables people to take action. Thanks to your generous support, lives are being transformed, reports **Kat Dixon**.

Supporting Family Medical Point, Uganda, in reshaping attitudes

ACCESS TO CONTRACEPTION + REMOVING THE STIGMA + TACKLING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

At the end of last year, we were excited to welcome a new partner to Empower to Plan. Family Medical Point (FMP), based in Abaita Ababiri, Uganda, is a not-for-profit sexual and reproductive healthcare provider which reached out to our supporters for help to change the attitude towards contraception in their communities. Contraception use here is viewed with suspicion, and the stigma attached to the uptake of family planning services is thought to be linked to the prevalence of gender-based violence in the area, which is amongst the highest in the world.

Moses Odongo, Team Leader at FMP, explains: “Men use pregnancy and child-bearing as leverage to control a woman, so women are denied access to the family planning services that they need. Women have to seek permission from their partners. The services are also rare and unaffordable. This combination makes it very difficult for a woman to access the service she needs.”

“Men use pregnancy and child-bearing as leverage to control a woman, so women are denied access to the family planning services that they need.”

AMBITIOUS PLANS

FMP has ambitious plans to transform perceptions. Using a two-part programme, the organisation aims to generate support from key stakeholders within the fishing communities of the Wakiso District to champion the safe delivery of



family planning resources. Part one of the programme will include training 20 on-the-ground peer educators to deliver Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) workshops to the



community, embedding additional messaging designed to educate men on gender equality and remove the stigma surrounding the use of family planning services. Moses adds: “We want to enable women to make a choice and demystify the use of family planning.” The second part of the programme aims to see the development and production of a drama show that will be broadcast on a local radio station, with accompanying advertising materials. Using an ‘edutainment’ approach, the show will feature empowered female characters, consensual relationships, and the use of family planning services without judgement or stigma. The use of storytelling in this way will be an accessible and engaging vehicle to promote gender equality, normalise

healthy relationships and contraception.

FMP has raised over three quarters of its project target through the generosity of Empower to Plan supporters. Although the project still needs help to reach its total goal, they’ve already been able to set their plans in motion, including training 10 volunteers to deliver family planning workshops. Running parallel to this, part two of the programme has been launched, with the early conceptualisation of the radio show now under way.

CAN YOU HELP?

FMP needs your help to reach the finishing line and fulfil its ambitions in Abaita Ababiri. Donate today at populationmatters.org/family-medical-point.

Empower to Plan is PM’s flagship crowdfunding scheme. Thanks to your donations, PM is able to provide financial assistance to small grassroots NGOs (non-governmental organisations) who know exactly what needs to be done in their communities – whether that’s empowering girls and women through the delivery of on-the-ground family planning, or supporting environmental conservation solutions that benefit entire neighbourhoods.

Helping UK charity You Before Two to deliver change digitally

PROMOTING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS + EMPOWERING YOUNG WOMEN + TACKLING TEENAGE PREGNANCY

The ongoing pandemic has seen an increase in services shifting online, including schools and institutions worldwide delivering sessions over the internet. As the outbreak hit, one of Empower to Plan's long-standing partners, the UK-based relationships and sex education charity, You Before Two, identified an urgent need to give its website a complete overhaul. With face-to-face workshop delivery impacted, sessions transferred online. It soon became clear that a sophisticated re-development of the charity's website was needed. The pandemic also hit some of its expected income. Worries about covering overheads and workshop facilitators took the focus away from its vital work with young people.



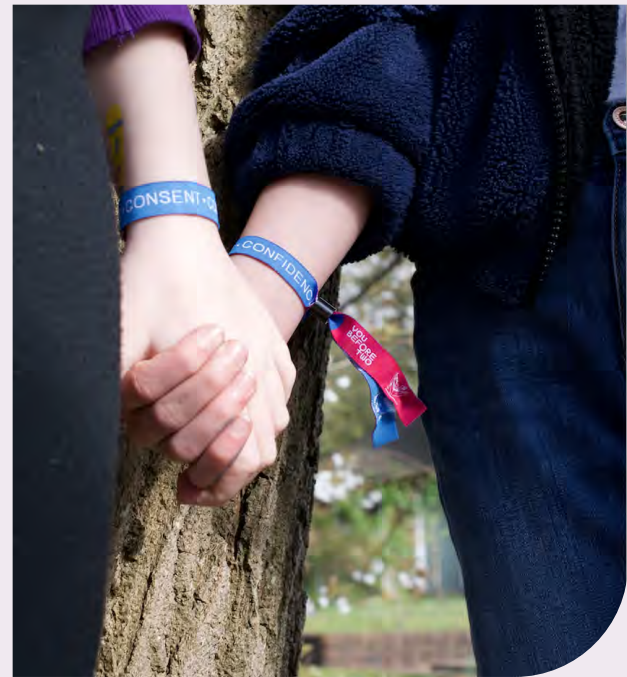
“Our aim is to educate and empower young women growing up in a deprived area.”

Thanks to PM's Empower to Plan supporters, You Before Two has achieved almost 90% of its fundraising target so far. Using an agreed advance,

the charity has been able to commission an agency to begin working on the new website development. This included the development of a sophisticated resource area that could be accessed by young people worldwide, as well as teachers looking to implement the UK government's new Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum plans.

INFORMED CHOICES

Working with partner schools, You Before Two takes groups of girls and boys in deprived areas of Nottinghamshire, where levels of teenage pregnancy



© Aaron Edmonds

and poverty remain high, through a fun and supportive programme. Founder, Dr Rebecca Foljambe, says: “Our aim is to educate and empower young women growing up in a deprived area, and to prioritise the enrichment of their minds and bodies before even considering having a baby.” To help them understand the impact of their family planning decisions on the wider world, the programme also includes a session on the issue of unsustainable population growth – a topic that's rarely taught within the context of relationships and sex education.

CAN YOU HELP?

You Before Two is looking forward to launching its new website, with improved online workshop capabilities and a resource section that's accessible to anybody around the world. Can you help the charity reach its target? Donate today at populationmatters.org/you-two.

Emergency relief for Ghettoh Clean Youth Group in Kenya

IMPROVING SANITATION + DISTRIBUTING CONTRACEPTION + UPSCALING FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES



We're continuing to support Ghettoh Clean Youth Group in Kibra, the largest slum in Africa, with its emergency coronavirus response through a second flash project. Your support helped Ghettoh Clean to put measures in place to improve sanitation facilities within their community, offset the shortage of condoms and begin their plan to scale up the limited family planning services offered in Kibra. Unfortunately, the emergency continues and the group needs support to maintain the new sanitation services and expand its solid waste management programme, which ensures environmental conservation through responsible waste disposal.

CAN YOU HELP?

Ghettoh Clean is working tirelessly to get through the challenges they face due to the pandemic. Visit populationmatters.org/ghettoh-clean to find out more. For further information and to support organisations around the world, visit populationmatters.org/empower-to-plan

More babies for the nation

PM's **Alistair Currie** looks at a disturbing rise in restrictions on women's rights due to coercive population growth policies that put pressure on women to have larger families.

Last year, the policy of the Chinese government to force women in its Muslim Uyghur minority to be sterilised, have abortions, or get fitted with intrauterine devices, was a chilling reminder of how the threat of coercive and eugenics-inspired population control policies has not gone away.

However, there is another, and more widespread and insidious threat to women's rights emerging today: the overlap between a deeply conservative 'family values' agenda, and government policies intended to increase national populations.

In the most disturbing example of a coercive population growth policy, last year, Iran blocked public hospitals and clinics from providing contraception and performing vasectomies in an attempt to boost birth rates. Meanwhile, many populist, nationalist and/or far-right governments are pursuing domestic pro-natalist policies, encouraging or pressuring women to have larger families. The trend is strong in countries with authoritarian systems, or leaders with authoritarian tendencies, including China, Russia, Turkey, Hungary, Belarus and Poland.

SINISTER MOTIVATIONS

In many countries concerned about the economic effects of a very low birth rate, financial incentives for larger families are used, without any coercive element or other agenda. However, significant increases in births have not yet followed in places like China and Poland, and this is where more sinister motivations can come in.

A common central theme in European pro-birth policies and rhetoric is a reactionary and often religiously driven promotion of the traditional nuclear family, which in practice pushes women back into the kitchen and bedroom. Financial benefits for having children are often limited to those who are married or heterosexual, for instance.

ETHNIC NATIONALISM

Frequently in harness with this is a disturbing ethnic nationalism. Many East European populists subscribe to the idea of the 'great replacement' of white European Christians by other cultures and ethnicities. Poland's Prime Minister has said his government: "want[s] to reshape Europe and re-Christianise it". Hungary's Victor Orban has put it as simply: "We want Hungarian children. Migration for us is surrender." Disentangling population growth and

The UN's Sexual and Reproductive Health Agency is concerned that the focus of some population policies currently being implemented in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region could have a negative impact on women's and reproductive rights.

Alanna Armitage
UNFPA Regional Director
for Eastern Europe
and Central Asia



© Unsplash/Nikola Johnny Mirkovic

nationalistic goals from policies intended to limit women's freedom is not straightforward, but the shared agenda is evident, not least on the critical battleground for abortion rights. In 2018, one Hungarian minister declared that its population would be double if abortion had not been legal. Meanwhile, the pushback on abortion freedom in Russia forms part of the government's demographic agenda.

Vladimir Putin has said: "Russia's fate and its historic prospects depend on how many of us there are ... it depends on how many children are born in Russian families".

A TOXIC ALLIANCE

Few places exemplify this more than Poland, where a toxic alliance of conservative and religiously driven 'family values', concern over depopulation, and hostility to immigrants drives policies on family. In January 2021, it effectively introduced a total ban on abortion.

This nationalistic neo-eugenicist agenda is not restricted to nominally Christian countries, however. Turkey's President Erdogan has accused Western powers of wanting to suppress the Turkish population through birth control, whilst also calling for members of the Turkish diaspora to have families of five or more.

Abortion is technically legal in Turkey,

but is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain.

There's no room for complacency regarding potential abuses in pursuit of reduced population growth, but if the international community in the 2020s focuses on the history of population control rather than the *Handmaid's Tale* future threatened (and in some respects, already here) of the nationalistic pro-natal agenda, critical gains in women's reproductive rights and freedom stand to be lost.

Q&A with Alisha Graves

Founder and Executive Director of OASIS, which works to advance education and choice for women and girls in the Sahel, **Alisha Graves** is a new member of PM's Expert Advisory Group. Here she explains more about the organisation's work.



Q: What are the objectives of OASIS?

A: OASIS is a non-profit organisation working to advance education and choice for women and girls in the Sahel. We're focused on keeping girls in school, delaying marriage and overcoming barriers to family planning. Together with the Centre for Girls Education in Northern Nigeria, we've demonstrated that mentored girls' clubs (safe spaces) can increase girls' completion rates from secondary school by twenty-fold and raise the age of marriage by 2.5 years. With L'Initiative OASIS Niger, we're building a critical mass of leaders dedicated to the education and empowerment of women and girls via the Sahel Leadership Program.

Q: What's the prognosis for the Sahel as regards its population and climate change?

A: The population of the Sahel is expected to more than double by mid-century. Temperatures in the region are climbing faster than the global average, with a projected increase in air temperature of 2-3°C, and robust, negative effects on the staple crops. These projections, along with the low status of women, mean we must pay special attention to this region. In brief, academics and activists outside the region tend to overlook or minimise links between population and climate change. For example, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report cited family planning as being beneficial for mitigation, adaptation and health. But few of the popular press or research papers picked this up. Talking about the size of our carbon footprints without acknowledging the number of footprints is like trying to calculate the area of a rectangle using only the width. Understanding these links means we

should redouble our efforts to secure rights-based family planning policies and programmes and ensure they're available to individual women on a regional scale.

Q: You've also contributed to Project Drawdown, which identifies available and implementable solutions to climate change. What insights did you gain?

A: At Drawdown, we found that taken together, education and voluntary family planning are among the top solutions. By slowing population growth, there's the potential to avert 85 gigatons of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. But education without quality family planning services will be insufficient – it's through correct information and access to contraception that a woman achieves her desired family size. More educated girls are likely to marry later, use health services, and have decision-making power. These benefits are passed on to their children in a virtuous circle.

Q: Can you elaborate on the link between education, access to family planning and adapting agricultural practices as key to confronting climate change in the Sahel?

A: These are like three legs of a stool. Without all three, the region will not be able to sustain healthy lives by mid-century. Most Sahel leaders dedicated to girls' education and empowerment have not considered how a lack of control over fertility impedes women's ability to take charge of other aspects of their lives. Understanding how rights-based family planning can accelerate fertility decline and make it easier to meet all of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals is creating a lot of excitement and fresh energy.

SAHEL SNAPSHOT

- The Sahel is an ecological zone known for its resilient people and rich, diverse cultures. It stretches from the Atlantic Ocean eastwards through northern Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, northern Nigeria, Chad, and into Sudan.
- It's an area that faces many complex and interconnected challenges – from food insecurity and the impact of climate change, to political instability and fragile economies.
- The region has some of the world's highest rates of child marriage.
- By 2050, the region's population is expected to more than double. The G5 Sahel countries are projected to increase from 85 million today to nearly 200 million.
- The Sahel is experiencing extreme temperatures, which could climb by up to 6°C (43°F) by the end of the century, according to UN data, with potentially disastrous impacts.

Alisha Graves MPH (Master of Public Health) leads strategy, development and advocacy for OASIS. She lectures on population and food security in the Sahel and analysed the contribution of family planning for reducing greenhouse gas emissions for Project Drawdown.



Help us look to a better future

It's been a tumultuous year that's brought into focus a deadly imbalance between humans and nature. Enabling people and planet to thrive together during the next three decades is critical. Can you give an additional gift in our anniversary year for the benefit of future generations and our precious planet?



This will help us to:

- Accelerate our campaigns
- Lobby policymakers worldwide
- Inspire essential action
- Elevate our message of empowerment and choice-based solutions
- Achieve political and individual change
- Campaign for a better future in harmony with nature

#MAKEITPOSSIBLE

Please give £30 (or any amount you can spare) to our **30th anniversary appeal** today at:
populationmatters.org/30-years
 or send a cheque to:

Freepost POPULATION MATTERS.

Thank you for making a better future possible.



TM

Every choice counts