

UK 2030 Strategic Framework for International Climate and Nature Action

Population Matters submission: April 2022

Question 1 of 5

1 Relative to other nations or international organisations, what do you consider are the most impactful and strategic interventions that the UK Government can take for climate change mitigation internationally?

The most recent IPCC report, [Climate change 2022: mitigation of climate change](#), has provided clear guidance on specific measures that must be taken and, as a major economy, top overseas aid donor and the current COP President the government must show leadership by taking radical, rather than incremental action. It must also address underlying drivers of the crisis. Chapter 3 of the IPCC report identifies the role of population growth as one of the two "strongest drivers" (with GDP growth) of emissions and there is a strong [evidence base](#) on the value of measures to reduce population growth as a mitigation strategy. As Population Matters has expertise in this area, we shall focus on that here.

The UK has traditionally been a world leader in the promotion of women's empowerment through education and family planning via ODA. These are particularly effective measures to reduce family size and reduce population growth through positive means, helping at the same time to achieve almost all the Sustainable Development Goals. Investing in this area builds on what was previously a strength of the government. However, the cut in ODA to 0.5% of GNI has impacted both badly-needed services and undermined the UK's status and reputation. Restoring the 0.7% principle this year is essential and can be justified not just as a humanitarian approach but one that meets climate goals established by the government. Similarly, the government's cut in contribution to UNFPA must also be restored.

Question 2 of 5

2 Relative to other nations or international organisations, what do you consider are the most impactful and strategic interventions that the UK Government can take to support international climate change adaptation action?

Poverty and climate vulnerability are closely linked, and population growth is also correlated to climate vulnerability in the case of many low-income countries. Measures to help vulnerable nations escape poverty are therefore critical to adaptation and resilience. In our previous answer we identified the critical value of aid, but it is only one factor. Fair terms of trade are essential across the board, and post-Brexit trade deals can be used to promote climate mitigation and resilience by favouring climate-positive measures and products. Meeting, and exceeding, obligations to support low-income nations via loss and damage mechanisms and direct assistance are also essential. As COP resident the UK must redouble efforts to secure agreement on a robust, generous and effective mechanism for loss and damage.

Population is also relevant to adaptation in four ways. Reduced population growth (through the measures itemised in the last reply) will help promote the demographic dividend, reduce demand-side pressures on services and public budgets in low-income countries, and reduce demand for climate-vulnerable needs such as food and water. Fourthly, as the measures that address population growth primarily empower women and girls, they will both reduce their vulnerability to climate change effects (which are recognised to be greater than those faced by men) and offer opportunities for female leadership on environmental issues, increasing resilience across communities.

Question 3 of 5

3 Relative to other nations or international organisations, what do you consider are the most impactful interventions the UK Government can take to halt biodiversity loss internationally?

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem services has identified population growth as one of five key indirect drivers of biodiversity loss, and it is identified in the graphic accompanying this consultation. Empowering voluntary population solutions such as those identified in the answers above are also supported in the [Dasgupta Report](#) delivered last year. The Environmental Audit Committee's [Bloom or Bust](#) report in 2021 specifically backed the Dasgupta Report's call for increased levels of aid for family planning and restoration of UK overseas aid to 0.7%. Instruments such as the Darwin Initiative and Biodiverse Landscapes Fund are also available to support these solutions.

All the measures identified in the answers above (family planning, gender equality, education and poverty alleviation) have the same benefits in regard to biodiversity as climate change. In some respects they offer greater advantages, as the combination of poverty and population growth in low-income countries can have a powerful local effect on biodiversity, through mechanisms such as deforestation for firewood and harvesting for bushmeat.

Economic growth is also a key indirect driver of biodiversity loss. The government should work with other governments and international institutions to develop and promote macro-economic policies and structures which fundamentally re-orientate economic activity towards planetary health and human wellbeing. This should include ending reliance on GDP as a measure of economic performance.

In the short term, the UK as a major trading nation should ensure trade deals do not favour products that contribute to biodiversity loss, especially agricultural products, and which promote sustainable agriculture and industry.

Question 4 of 5

What are the most important interventions the UK Government can take to deliver co-benefits for climate, nature and people? And which are the trade-offs to consider?

Supporting education, gender equality and family planning through ODA and other financial mechanisms, such as climate or biodiversity funds, represents a win-win solution that yields multiple benefits with minimal negative trade-offs. In particular, support for family planning has a very high return on investment. A 2019 [Guttmacher Institute report](#) found that meeting the unmet need for

modern family planning would result in US\$16bn of savings in maternal health costs, though 21 million fewer unplanned births, 46 million fewer abortions and 70,000 fewer pregnancy-related deaths each year. This represents a saving of \$3 for every \$1 spent.

These savings relate to maternal health alone. In 2014 [Copenhagen Consensus research](#) suggested that each dollar spent on family planning could yield \$120 of benefits, including through reducing pressure on health and education services, enabling greater investment in human capital and increased economic development arising from reduced population pressures.

These assessments do not address environmental benefits, including from protection or enhancement of ecosystem services. The main trade-off that occurs with these measures is that the macro effects can take some time to manifest and they must form part of a balanced strategy including measures with more immediate benefits.

There is no question that adopting a more rational economic system carries far more challenges for governments and people. Short-term negative effects are almost inevitable but the Dasgupta and February 2022 IPCC Mitigation of climate change reports show that transformational change is both essential and possible. Unless our environmental problems are addressed, the economic consequences long-term will be deep, permanent and severe.

Question 5 of 5

Do you have any evidence regarding particular regions or countries we should be focusing on, both in the immediate and long term, given expected trends?

Unmet need for family planning, poor gender equality and climate vulnerability is high in many low-income countries. In the government's targeted areas, East Africa faces significant problems in this area, as well as threats to biodiversity. Kenya, for instance, has a population growth rate of 2.19%, Uganda 2.68% and Tanzania 2.87%. Investment in ender and family planning solutions will therefore provide a high level of benefit.

Among key identified partners, Nigeria faces dramatic population growth, while generating significantly increasing emissions and facing significant biodiversity threats. As things stand, the 2022 SDG Gender Index found Nigeria moving backwards on gender, its population is set to double by 2050, while fossil fuels are at the heart of its economy. Support for decarbonisation through trade and climate finance, and support for positive measures to reduce population growth through women's empowerment and family planning in Nigeria would be highly effective in meeting the strategy's aims.

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