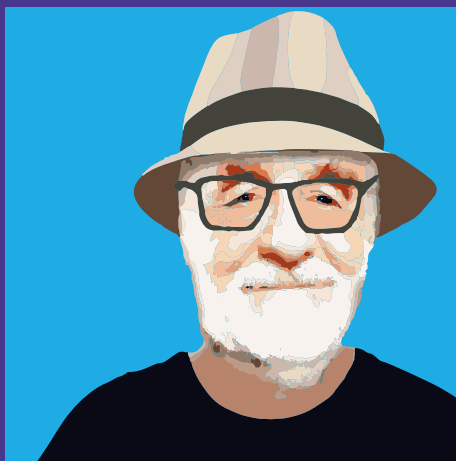
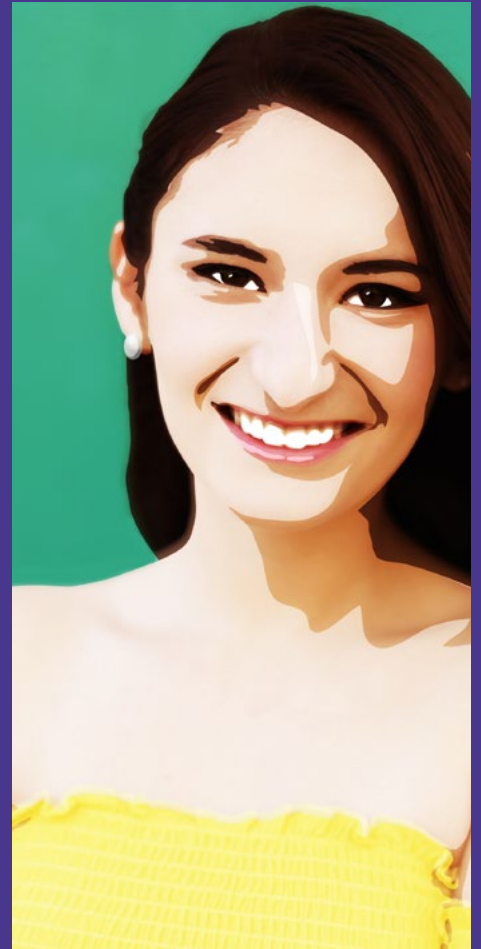


# POPULATION MATTERS

Issue 41 Autumn 2022

## Our inspirational 2022 Change Champions



## 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 are committed to 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: The Chandlery, 50 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7QY. Population Matters is the working name of the Optimum Population Trust Registered trademark.

## Magazine

**For Population Matters: Robin Maynard**, Executive Director | **Alistair Currie**, Head of Campaigns and Communications | **Izi Clery**, Head of Fundraising and Engagement | **Ben Stallworthy**, Digital and Communications Manager | **Andrew Howard**, Senior Campaigner | **Catriona Spaven-Donn**, Empower to Plan Project Coordinator | **Monica Scigliano**, Researcher and Policy Adviser | **Florence Blondel**, Communications Officer

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## From the Director

It's time for the main environment groups who refuse to promote the top available solutions to climate change to move out of the way and let the new generation of campaigners have their voices heard.



**AS I WRITE**, it's just over two months since the US Supreme Court ruling of 24 June overturned the previous ruling of 1973, known as *Roe v Wade*, which had affirmed that a woman's right to have an abortion was protected by the US Constitution. The current ruling asserts no such protection exists and so individual states can set their own laws. So far, 12 have banned abortion comprehensively, with more than half of America's 50 states set to follow or severely restrict availability.

### PROGRESS IN REVERSE

PM's recent report, *Welcome to Gilead*, highlighting the rise of pronatalist policies and the restriction of women's reproductive rights globally, has proved grimly prophetic. Taking its title from Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, the case studies it features indicate a trend reversing decades of progress – often with tragic consequences. These include that of the 30-year-old Polish woman with a non-viable foetus who died of septic shock because no doctor would perform an emergency procedure due to Poland's restrictive abortion laws.

Enabling choice and rights prevents such tragedies, prioritises people's

wellbeing, and eases pressure on our planet. As Project Drawdown confirmed (again) in its most recent ranking of the top available solutions to climate change: enabling access to and choice over family planning, along with universal quality education, is the third most effective way of tackling climate change through slowing and reducing population growth.

Perversely (again), none of the main environment groups promote this solution. They should get out of the way for the new generation of smart, effective campaigners who have the intelligence and integrity to recognise that human population is a key factor in climate change, biodiversity loss, and upon people's wellbeing and quality of life – especially in poorer countries on the frontline of climate impacts.

**The new generation of campaigners have the intelligence and integrity to recognise that human population is a key factor in climate change, biodiversity loss, and upon people's quality of life.**

Young campaigners with the courage to speak out on those connections, such as Vineeta Meena of Rajasthan Rising, working to end child marriage in India and for girls to get the full education that should be a basic human right. Also, Chidera Benoit in Nigeria, who 'tells it as it is' – the organisation he set up is called 'Population Explosion Awareness Initiative' – what else is a projected near trebling of Nigeria's population by 2100 if not an 'explosion'? And Nyombi Morris, the Ugandan climate change campaigner who underlines the need to have more 'Population Conversations' like the gathering I attended in Kenya in March. These young campaigners – who we're proud to acknowledge as our 'Change

Champions' – need our support, for their voices and views to be heard. Not to be patronised by NGOs based in the Global North who seek to impose on them a narrative that suits western sensibilities and perspectives.

### THE FIGHT FOR GLOBAL JUSTICE

Global justice demands we clean up our act and make reparations to enable poorer countries to adapt and become resilient to the unavoidable climate shocks. But, as Alistair Currie reveals (pages 6–7) in his dissection of who's responsible in terms of the proportion of global emissions, it is too simplistic to point the finger just at the elites of the world.

Whilst the poorest contribute the least to climate change individually, their collective contribution has increased considerably as overall numbers have grown. A double injustice: trapped in poverty, yet adding to climate change that they will suffer from the most.

A recent UN report, *Motherhood in Childhood*, reveals that nearly a third of all women in low- and middle-income countries become mothers aged 19 or younger – children giving birth to children. A disgrace, given the solutions for providing those girls with autonomy over their bodies are both readily available and would enable them to contend better with climate change. As David Attenborough asks rhetorically, "Why wouldn't we want to do these things? Giving people a greater opportunity of life is what we want to do anyway."

Indeed, which is why we must call-out and challenge the regressive policies, senseless ideologies and perverse perspectives that obstruct the obvious and achievable.

**Robin Maynard**

Executive Director, Population Matters



# Population Matters news round-up

## The climate crisis: ethical population action a key solution

Project Drawdown, the world-leading study of climate change solutions, recently published updated information on a range of solutions to reduce carbon emissions globally. Family planning and education, resulting in slower population growth, were rated as key to tackling the climate crisis.

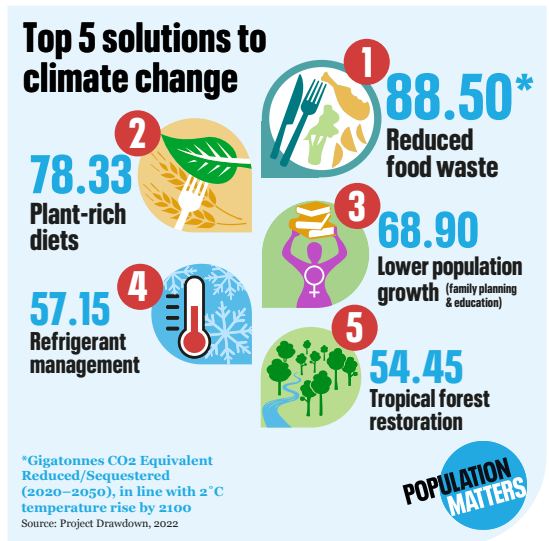
After reducing food waste (saving 88.50 gigatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>) and switching to plant-rich diets (saving 78.33 gigatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>) lowering population growth via ethical family planning and education (saving 68.90 gigatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>) has been identified as the next most effective solution to limiting global warming.

This update now makes ethical population actions the third most effective solution (of 93) in limiting global warming to 2°C, and the seventh

most effective in limiting warming to 1.5°C, by the year 2100; and in the 2°C scenario, still more effective than each of the technological solutions available.

Project Drawdown’s ‘Reproductive Rights and Education’ solution explicitly calls for voluntary family planning for all girls, women and couples around the world, and universal access to quality education for all children, stating: “Slower population growth, a cascading outcome of increased family planning and rising education levels, contributes to reduced greenhouse gas emissions.”

While PM supports tackling unsustainable levels of consumption in high-income countries as crucial to fighting the climate crisis, we



will also continue to be vocal in promoting the fact that these ethical population solutions must be acknowledged and funded as climate mitigation measures.

Who’s responsible for all those emissions that are driving climate change? See page 6 >>

## Explore the impact of population

We’re very happy about the positive feedback we’ve been getting on our new interactive Population Explorer. Human population growth is a critical but severely overlooked factor in environmental issues and this interactive online tool aims to explain the crucial links between population growth and our biggest environmental crises.

Contrary to what many people think, our population is still growing and will most likely continue to do so until near the end of the century, unless we ramp up action to empower everyone, everywhere to choose smaller families.

The Population Explorer brings together the most authoritative recent data on population past and future, climate change and emissions, biodiversity, land use and resources, and allows people to explore how they affect one another in an attractive and accessible online tool. It can be used to find data on specific countries, to test your knowledge by answering



questions, and to understand the relationships between drivers by selecting different views and maps.

Most importantly, it also explores the positive and empowering solutions that help us to tackle population growth and address our greatest environmental challenges. Information is empowering, and by providing positive steps for people to take once they’ve investigated the data, the Population Explorer helps to turn knowledge into action.

If you haven’t checked it out yet, do have a go at exploring the links between population, biodiversity, climate change and natural resources. Don’t forget to share it widely to help reach more people! Visit: [explore.populationmatters.org](http://explore.populationmatters.org)

## World population by numbers

It took us until 1800 to reach one billion. Today we add another billion every 14-15 years. In just a few weeks’ time, on 15 November, the UN projects our population to reach eight billion. By 2100, without empowering action, our population will likely be nearly 10.5 billion.

1800: 985,083,735

1900: 1,645,092,253

1920: 1,923,619,236

1950: 2,536,431,018

1970: 3,700,437,042

1990: 5,327,231,041

2020: 7,794,798,729

2022: 8,000,000,000

2040: 9,158,747,000

2050: 9,687,440,000

Source: United Nations World Population Prospects 2022

Photo by Gillich Lab on Unsplash



## Unplanned pregnancies on the rise

This year's State of the World Population (SWP) report by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) focuses on the worrying issue of unintended

pregnancies. Still approximately half of all pregnancies today are unplanned, and the number of affected women is increasing.

The report states: "The number of unintended pregnancies that occur every year – 121 million, or 331,000 per day on average – represents a global failure to uphold a basic human right. And that failure is expected to grow. While recent data also shows that, worldwide, the unintended pregnancy rate fell between 1990 and 2019, continued global population growth means that the absolute number of unintended pregnancies will keep rising without decisive action."

In light of the US Supreme Court's overturning of Roe v Wade, ramping up efforts to empower women and girls to take charge of their bodies and lives is critical. Unwanted pregnancy detrimentally impacts both mothers and their children, and as a result, all of society. Ending child marriage and gender-based violence is key, as are overturning harmful patriarchal norms and opening up opportunities for young women to pursue education and careers and to access quality reproductive health care.

Discover how PM is opening up the global population conversation on page 14 >>

## Doubling your impact with the Green Match Fund

Just as with last year's Big Give Christmas Challenge, we were delighted to exceed our fundraising target for the Green Match Fund, which we launched on Earth Day in April.



We received £5,000 from The Big Give to match with donations from our generous donors, and we raised a total of £10,659 during the challenge week. Please keep an eye out in your email inboxes for information on the next matched-funding campaign we're taking part in during the first week of December. The majority of our income comes from individual donors, and we are deeply grateful for all your support.

Find out more about our new HUMANATURE campaign on page 16 >>



## James Lovelock 1919-2022

*"Those who fail to see that population growth and climate change are two sides of the same coin are either ignorant or hiding from the truth. These two huge environmental problems are inseparable and to discuss one while ignoring the other is irrational."*

We were saddened to hear of the death of our patron James Lovelock on 26 July, at the age of 103. He was best known as the creator of the Gaia Theory, which stated that the earth and the living beings upon it all interacted with one another to regulate and sustain life and could be thought of as a single living organism. The theory was widely adopted and supported in the environmental movement, and influential in promoting recognition of the interconnectedness of planetary and natural systems.

Working in a number of different fields, and usually independently of academic institutions and organisations, he said: "My role has been to bring separated things together and make the whole more than the sum of the parts." Humane but clear-sighted, James often spoke of human population growth as a key factor affecting and destabilising our planet. We are proud to have had him as a patron.

## Leilani Münter wins BBC's Evergreen Athlete Award



Huge congratulations to retired racing driver and PM patron Leilani Münter, winner of the BBC's inaugural Evergreen Athlete Award. These new awards celebrate individuals and organisations from across the globe who are actively contributing to a more sustainable future through their sporting profile

and practises. A panel of judges recognised Leilani as a pioneer in using her platform – including the branding on her racing car itself – to such prominent effect in raising awareness of environmental issues. Passionate, articulate and energetic in promoting the population cause, we're honoured to count her among our patrons. The main awards programme will air on the BBC in October. An interview with Leilani can be found in PM magazine 33 from Autumn 2018.

Turn to page 10 to read about the lasting impact of another of our patrons, Sir David Attenborough >>>

# THE FIGHT FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

While we all understand that the wealthiest produce more emissions than the poorest, and the poorest suffer more from climate change than the richest, the role of inequality in climate change is far from straightforward, writes PM's **Alistair Currie**.

**WHO'S RESPONSIBLE** for all those emissions that are driving climate change? Cigar-chomping capitalists flying their private jets to the cup games of their football team? How about the richest 10% of people globally – who need to slash their consumption and reign in their lifestyles if we stand a chance of saving the planet?

While it's easy to apportion blame on the elites, there's a much more complex story to unravel. In fact, when you take a deep dive into some of the most recent studies, people defined as being in the 'bottom 90%' actually produce about half of all emissions.

## INCOME BANDS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

In an attempt to get to the bottom of the issue, in 2015, Oxfam conducted a highly influential and frequently quoted study to assess just who was driving climate change. In 2020, in collaboration with the Stockholm Environment Institute, it conducted another, examining how different global income bands had driven climate change between 1990 and 2015. Their findings included:

- The world's richest 1% of people produce more emissions than the 50% of people on the lowest incomes
- The world's richest 10% accounted for just over half of the emissions added to the atmosphere between 1990 and 2015
- The per capita emissions of the richest 10% will need to be around 10 times lower by 2030 to keep the world on track for just 1.5C of warming – this is equivalent to cutting global annual emissions by a third
- The average emissions of the richest 10% of Indians is just one-quarter of the poorest half of the US population, while average emissions of the poorest half of the Indian population is just one-twentieth that of even the poorest half of the population in the US

While these figures tell us that our global economic system is profoundly dysfunctional, and that climate change represents its injustices in the starkest terms, the share of emissions is not the whole story. These studies have led some people to conclude that inequity is the principal driver of climate change, and, if we tackle that, we can create a more just world – and fix our planet. If only it were that simple.

## HIGHEST TO LOWEST EARNERS

The Oxfam studies identified four different income categories: the highest earning 1% of the global population; the highest

earning 10%; the next 40% (the 'middle' group); and the remaining 50%, the 'bottom half'. Looking at actual emissions of each group, as opposed to the proportion of emissions, reveals a story a little different to the headline figures. The contributions of each group between 1990 and 2015 were as follows:

- Top 1% were responsible for 15% of emissions
- Top 10% responsible for 52% (37% if you remove the 1%)
- Middle 40% responsible for 41%
- Bottom 50% responsible for 7%

So, although the bottom 50% have a negligible impact on emissions, the top 1% are responsible for just a sixth of emissions – grossly disproportionate, but not the primary driver of climate change. And, while the biggest single contribution was by the top 10%, even the middle-income group produced more than twice as much as the 1%. Things get more complicated still when you understand exactly what those income bands actually are:

- Top 1% - earning more than US\$106,000
- Top 10% - earning more than \$38,000
- Middle 40% - earning between \$6,000-\$38,000
- Bottom 50% - earning under \$6,000

To put this into context, the average UK annual salary in 2015 was £27,615 (today just over £31,000), equivalent at that time to US\$42,000. In other words, the top 10% of people globally was anyone earning around the UK average. This reveals that many of us are 'the rich' – and we need to live with much less if we're going to have a hope of securing our future. When we look at the band below that 10%, we realise something pretty shocking:

if you earn more than \$6,000 dollars a year, you are in the top income half of everyone in the world. And yet

that band of people earning less than \$38,000 but more than \$6,000 – who would only appear rich to someone living in desperate poverty – drove 40% of emissions between 1990 and

2015. Even the lowest income category of all were still responsible for 7% of emissions.

Other figures from the report bear out the impact this has. Annual emissions – broadly determined by level of economic activity relating to consumption, and the level and mix of fossil fuels in the production of energy – grew by 60% between 1990 and 2015. The top 5% were responsible for about a third of that growth (37%) – which means two-thirds came from the rest of us. Of course, a critical factor in driving emissions is how much stuff we produce and

**The per capita emissions of the richest 10% will need to be around 10 times lower by 2030 to keep the world on track for just 1.5°C of warming**

consume. Unsurprisingly, the more people there are with more income, the more our emissions go up. And more and more people are escaping poverty and becoming richer.

**MORE, MORE, MORE**

According to the study, in 1990, the total carbon emissions of the middle 40% were 9.2 Gigatonnes (GtCO<sub>2</sub>) and in 2015, 15.7 GtCO<sub>2</sub> – an increase of 70%. Over that period, the actual income ranges of people in that bracket increased from \$2,000–\$27,000 in 1990 to \$6,000–\$38,000 in 2015 (adjusted for inflation). Those people had more money, and, on average, each produced more carbon by the end of that period, with per capita emissions rising from 4.4 tonnes (tCO<sub>2</sub>) to 5.3 – an increase of a fifth.

Where we see a bigger increase, however, is not the emissions individuals produce but the number of individuals. In 1990, there were 2.1 billion people in the middle 40%, in 2015 very nearly 3 billion, an increase of 40%. In other words, the number of people in this income range appears to have driven the increase in total emissions more than their greater affluence.

**POVERTY AND POPULATION GROWTH**

There's very good news there, in that more people are escaping poverty and gaining greater economic security and opportunity. But the picture isn't all rosy. For the poorest 50% of people, per capita emissions rose by just 1.5%, reflecting minimal extra income, but their total emissions rose by 39%. Why? Because their numbers rose by more than a third from 2.65 billion in 1990 to 3.62 billion in 2015. People at the bottom aren't getting much richer, and there are far more of them.

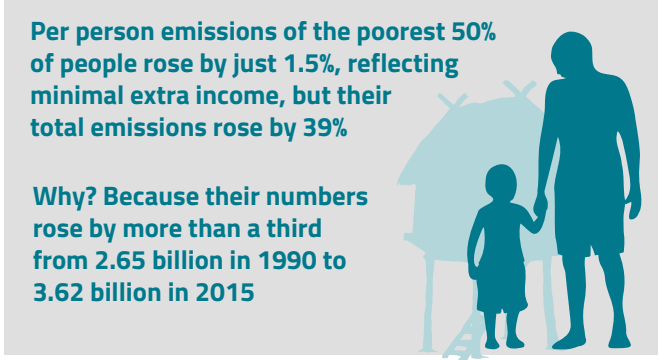
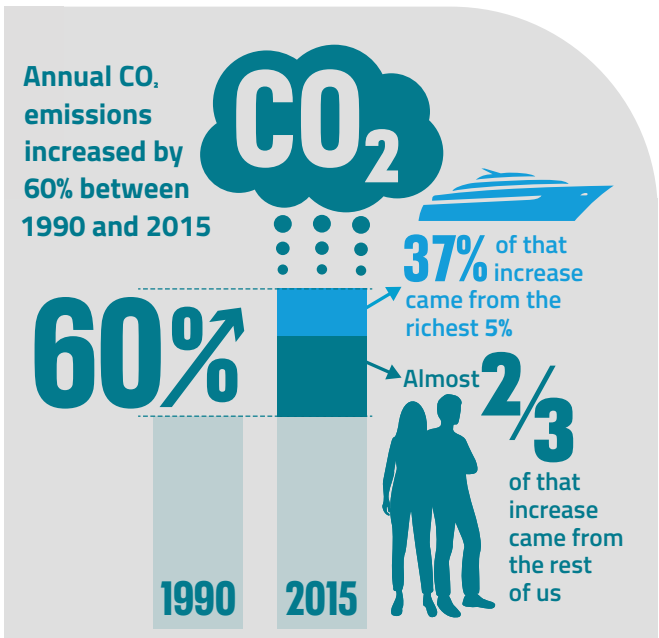
While those numbers are an indictment of an economic system that serves to make the rich richer rather than the poor less poor, we know that what's driving that increase in numbers is population growth, which is closely linked to and

**“The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that globally, GDP per capita and population growth remained the strongest drivers of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from fossil fuel combustion in the last decade.”**

driven by poverty. This year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that globally, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita and population growth remained the strongest drivers of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from fossil fuel combustion in the last decade.

People have an absolute right to escape poverty and lead decent lives on decent incomes, yet, when they do that, their emissions go up. That means that those of us who are in that top 10% need to cut our emissions drastically, but also that if fewer people are born into poverty, the total amount of emissions produced when, hopefully, they escape it will be lower too.

We can rightfully blame the richest for driving climate change – but blame only takes us so far in identifying solutions. We must eliminate fossil fuel use as much and as soon as possible – but the number of us is still a critical factor. The UN currently projects 1.7 billion more people by 2050. Most of that growth will occur in the poorest places, often the most



vulnerable to climate change. If we want more people to live better lives with more choices, our numbers matter.

Ultimately, what these studies tell us is what we should all know: climate change is messy and complicated, and that apportioning blame is not as useful as identifying what will work in the future. Far better, then, to consider the compelling evidence of how positive, empowering solutions that provide people with choices can reduce population growth, improve lives and play a vital part in achieving climate justice.

A longer and more detailed version of this article is available on [populationmatters.org](http://populationmatters.org) – search 'fat cats' on our search function.

# Meet our amazing CHANGE CHAMPIONS 2022

**POPULATION  
MATTERS**

## WOMEN'S CHAMPION ANTONINA LEWANDOWSKA

Antonina is a reproductive rights activist, sex educator, and sociologist. She works at the Foundation for Women and Family Planning (FEDERA), a Polish NGO fighting for sexual and reproductive rights, and coordinator of the ASTRA Network – a network of sexual and reproductive health and rights and women’s rights organisations across Central and Eastern Europe. She is also a volunteer sex educator for the Warsaw-based Ponton Sex Educators Group, which holds workshops and provides counselling hotlines for young people to discuss key issues such as contraception, consent, pregnancy, LGBTQI+ identities and violence prevention. At the University of Warsaw, she is also the first-ever consultant for sexual abuse in the Student’s Union. Antonina wrote the foreword to Population Matters’ 2021 *Welcome to Gilead* report.



She says: *“The provision of access to comprehensive sexuality education, contraceptives, abortion, high-quality prenatal testing, and other reproductive services is the policymakers’ duty. Unfortunately, fundamentalists and authoritarian governments do not recognise that fact – but as women’s rights activists, we are here to change that. Thank you, Population Matters, for standing arm in arm with Eastern European women who so often are forgotten in the international arena.”*

Our Change Champions awards recognise inspiring change-makers around the world for their work that sheds light on the issues around unsustainable human population pressure and to advance the urgently needed, globally beneficial solutions.

**TO MARK WORLD POPULATION DAY** 2022 on 11 July, we gave awards to individuals and organisations across the globe. This was to recognise their progressive, effective and brave work promoting reproductive rights, the empowerment of women and girls, defending the environment, and enlightening the public about the challenges we face and the solutions that are available. The winners each received a uniquely designed award as well as a £500 donation for the charity or cause of their choice. Here’s an opportunity to find out more about these inspiring individuals and their achievements.

## YOUNG CAMPAIGNER VINEETA MEENA

Vineeta is a girl leader from the Karauli district of Rajasthan in India. Along with nine other girls, she founded Rajasthan Rising during the Covid lockdown of 2020 to campaign for access to education for girls and an end to child marriage. She says: *“I am very excited to receive this award to acknowledge the effort of all the girls who are part of Rajasthan Rising. For the last two years, along with other girl leaders, I have been working on increasing girls’ access to education so that they are not forced into child marriage. We have also been engaging decision-makers to organise more girls to join our movement and ensuring girls, especially from marginalised communities, can access their right to education and fight gender and caste-based discrimination.”*



## EARTH CHAMPION NYOMBI MORRIS

Nyombi, named as an Environmentalist of Tomorrow by CNN in 2021, is a climate change activist from Uganda and a Population Matters Change Ambassador. He has set up a project – Taking Climate Change to Schools – to inspire the younger generation to take action on climate change. The project includes promoting a climate syllabus in schools, planting trees, and recycling plastic waste. So far, he has visited 30 schools and has inspired children to plant over 47,500 trees. He is also a climate justice advocate for the Rise Up movement. Set up in 2019, it provides support for young people from all over the world to join forces and oppose climate change.





## ONLINE CAMPAIGN GIRLPLANET.EARTH

GirlPlanet.Earth is a website that provides a global platform for girls and women to openly discuss human population, hyper-consumption and climate change, and share stories and solutions.



Phoebe Barnard PhD, GirlPlanet.Earth, says: *"This award is a fabulous honour for the more than 80 amazing women from 40 countries so far who are becoming leaders in their own right, and have spoken up about population, consumption, planetary health and personal choice. Tell your own story!"*  
Pictured is Cat Simmons who received the award on behalf of GirlPlanet.Earth.

## FAMILY CHOICE CHAMPION ABBY RAMSEY

Earlier this year, Abby, a woman in her mid-20s from California, made a video announcing and celebrating that she had been sterilised, which then went viral. It opened up a conversation about women choosing child-free lives. She says: *"I never would have thought my sterilisation journey would have reached so many people, but I'm so glad that it did, because it has revealed that access to sterilisation (by choice) is important for both child-free people and parents alike. We should be able to choose the procedure that is right for us, free of judgement and pushback."*



## SHINING A LIGHT (FILM, BOOK OR TV PROGRAMME) THE HANDMAID'S TALE

*The Handmaid's Tale*, now into its fifth season, is set in the world of Margaret Atwood's Gilead, where women's reproductive rights are completely subjugated. The series now shares a chilling parallel with real life events – the overturning of the 1973 Roe v Wade abortion ruling by the US Supreme Court.

Bruce Miller, Executive Producer, says: *"We are grateful to Population Matters for this recognition. This award is an honour for myself and the talented team behind The Handmaid's Tale, but it is also a challenge. We need to keep using the fictional world of Gilead to explore the kind of deep and complex problems that challenge us in the real world today."*

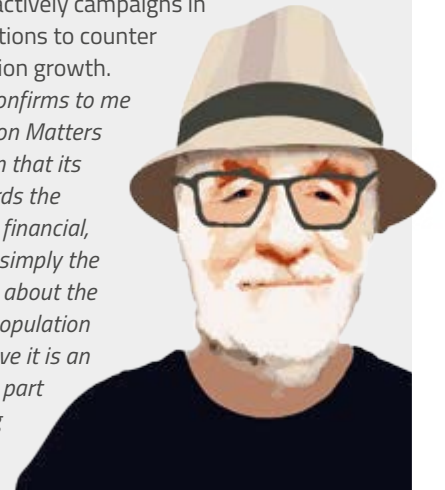
## MEDIA STORY LILY COLE INTERVIEW

In April 2022, *Hello!* magazine published an interview, conducted by Sharnaz Shahid, with runway model, actress, author and activist Lily Cole, in which she spoke about her passion for the environment and the importance of gender equality, women's empowerment, and tackling consumption and population growth.



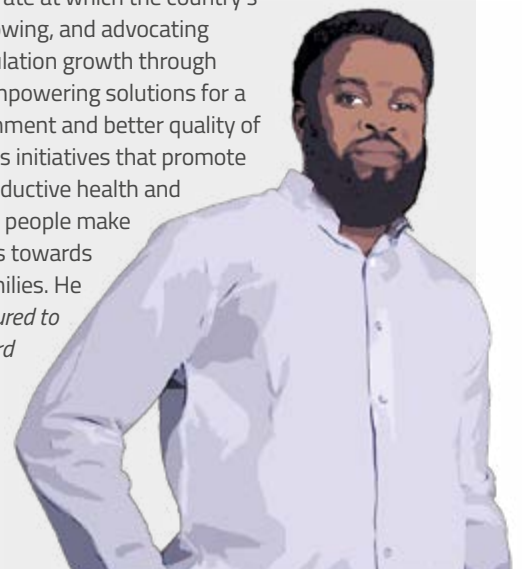
## PM SUPPORTER MARTIN EARL

Martin is the co-ordinator of the Population Matters London Group, a voluntary role he has held since its inception in 2017. He actively campaigns in support of ethical solutions to counter unsustainable population growth. He says: *"This award confirms to me the value that Population Matters puts on the contribution that its supporters make towards the cause – whether that's financial, their time and skills, or simply the way they talk to others about the issues. I volunteer for Population Matters because I believe it is an essential but neglected part of the answer to saving the planet."*



## SPECIAL AWARD CHIDERA BENOIT

Chidera is the founder and head of the Population Explosion Awareness Initiative (PEAI). This is an indigenous, non-profit organisation in Nigeria dedicated to raising awareness about the exponential rate at which the country's population is growing, and advocating for slowing population growth through non-coercive, empowering solutions for a healthier environment and better quality of life. It encourages initiatives that promote sexual and reproductive health and rights, and helps people make informed choices towards having small families. He says: *"I am honoured to receive this award from Population Matters. This reassures us of the relevance of the work we do at PEAi."*



# THE ATTENBOROUGH

In May, Population Matters Patron **Sir David Attenborough** turned 96 years old and it's probably no exaggeration to say that nobody has inspired as many people to care about the environment as he has. Our outgoing Communications Manager, **Olivia Nater**, reflects on his influence.

**DAVID ATTENBOROUGH'S** repeated warnings about our impact on the planet and urgent need to transform our relationship with nature stirred countless people to action. I am one of them. Having had the privilege of watching Sir David's natural history documentaries as a child had a huge influence on my career choices. I have always been an animal lover but Attenborough's engaging revelation of the jaw-dropping diversity of life around the world and the fascinating day-to-day struggles of fellow species cemented my passion.

I already knew in school that I wanted to study zoology and then work in environmental advocacy. At the University of Bristol, I was amused but unsurprised to

find that many of my fellow students' undergraduate degree choice had also been inspired by Sir David.

When he came to Blackwell's bookstore to sign copies of his autobiography *Life on Air*, the queue extended all the way down Park Street. He was supposed to be there for an hour but ended up staying for over three. (And yes, I waited that long and was one of the last people to get her book signed – thanks, Sir David!). We used to joke about how we all wanted to be “the next Attenborough” and it was a well-known fact that competition for internships at the BBC's Natural History Unit was fierce.

## A PLEA FROM THE HEART

This was 15 years ago, yet there is still no Attenborough replacement, and there probably never will be. Sir David doesn't only tell engaging stories with a uniquely soothing voice, he is also refreshingly honest about the scale and drivers of our environmental crises, and his pleas are clearly heartfelt.

His love and compassion for other species is infectious, and many people have been moved to tears by his documentaries (remember that walrus scene in *Our Planet?*). Most importantly, he is one of the few public figures who is outspoken about the root causes of our environmental crises:

*“As I see it, humanity needs to reduce its impact on the Earth urgently and there are three ways to achieve this: we can stop consuming so many resources, we can change our technology and we can reduce the growth of our population.”*

As reflected in the ‘IPAT’ equation – which maintains that impacts on ecosystems (I) are the product of the population size (P), affluence (A), and technology (T) of the human population in question – and similar scientific formulas, our impact on the planet is a product of our consumption habits and our numbers. And, depending on the technology in question, this can either have an amplifying effect (such as mass production, industrial agriculture), or a reducing effect (renewable energy, for example).

## ADDRESSING THE POPULATION FACTOR

While the need to end overconsumption and improve technologies is uncontested by most environmentalists, many still shy away from addressing the population factor.



# EFFECT

However, as Sir David puts it, we simply cannot ignore it:

*“All our environmental problems become easier to solve with fewer people, and harder – and ultimately impossible – to solve with ever more people.”*

He dedicated a whole documentary to the issue in 2009 with the BBC Horizon episode *How Many People Can Live on Planet Earth?* (in which he voiced his support for Population Matters which gave our profile a great boost), and his 2011 Royal Society presidential speech.

*“Fifty years ago, when the WWF was founded, there were about three billion people on earth. Now there are almost seven billion. Over twice as many – and every one of them needing space. Space for their homes, space to grow their food (or to get others to grow it for them), space to build schools and roads and airfields. Where could that come from? A little might be taken from land occupied by other people but most of it could only come from the land which, for millions of years, animals and plants had had to themselves – the natural world.”*

It is incredibly obvious that ever more of us means ever less wildlife. David Attenborough made this clear in most of his documentaries – I remember being particularly struck by this quote from *Life of Mammals* (2002):

*“Instead of controlling the environment for the benefit of the population, perhaps it’s time we controlled the population to allow the survival of the environment.”*

Finally, someone who isn’t blinded by anthropocentrism and doesn’t believe that humans have some God-given right to dominate and annihilate all other species, I thought to myself! Of course, his choice of words may not have been ideal (to many, ‘population control’ implies coercion), but he is absolutely right that there is an urgent need to change the way we view nature.



## PUSHING FOR EMPOWERING SOLUTIONS

Sir David has repeatedly used his platform to call for empowering population solutions, including in his RSA speech and in this 2012 interview with the Wellcome Trust:

*“Wherever you empower women, wherever they have the vote, wherever they have the education, wherever they have the free will and are in charge of their lives and not dictated to by men, the birth rate falls.”*

This call was repeated in 2020’s *A Life on our Planet*, and he rightly added:

*“Why wouldn’t we want to do these things? Giving people a greater opportunity of life is what we want to do anyway. The trick is to raise the standard of living around the world, without increasing our impact on that world.”*

Population Matters is incredibly grateful to have Sir David as a patron and, both as an organisation and as individuals, we will continue to do our best to honour his wish for a better world for both people and wild species.

## SIGN UP TODAY

Population Matters campaigns to raise awareness of the issues surrounding population and the promotion of practical, positive, rights-based solutions. Keep up to date with our work by joining our mailing list at [populationmatters.org/newsletter](https://populationmatters.org/newsletter).



# 10,431,000,000

This figure is where the UN sees our human population peaking in 2086, according to its projections released on **World Population Day**. And, while this is the first time this century that the UN has predicted a peak, followed by a slow decline, the population conversation is far from over, writes PM's **Alistair Currie**.

**THE PROJECTED BENDING DOWN** of the population curve would be a milestone moment, providing the opportunity for better lives and greater choices for a greater proportion of people. However, it still means a prediction of nearly 2.5 billion more people in 2086 than are on our planet today – and of more than five times the size of our population when Population Matters' patron, Sir David Attenborough, was born in 1926.

The fact that our population won't peak sooner than 2086, before starting to inch down by roughly 10 million a year towards the end of the century, simply serves to demonstrate that we have not done enough to address global justice and inequality. It is in a number of the world's Least Developed Countries, as the UN defines them, that fertility rates remain above 6, compared to a global average of just 2.3.

Continued population growth over the next 60 years is a red flag for injustice and human suffering. It persists where people are poor, where infant mortality remains high, where too few children finish school and where women cannot freely access and use modern contraception.

## PROGRESS, BUT NOT ENOUGH

Indeed, *World Population Prospects 2022*, the most recent set of projections from the United Nations Population Division (UNPD), reveals that there is still much progress to be made.

For example, the 46 fastest growing countries are also some of the most impoverished and most vulnerable to climate change, and 10% of babies are still born to adolescent girls, for whom pregnancy is the leading killer. We know too that, in 2022, poverty and food insecurity are growing again, that

globally about half of all pregnancies are unintended, that more women have an unmet need for modern contraception than ever before – and that progress towards the UN's Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 is going backwards instead of forwards for the second year in a row.

As the UN says in its report: "While economic growth may struggle to keep pace with population growth, poverty can deprive individuals of opportunities and choices, limiting their ability to control their fertility, perpetuating high levels of childbearing often starting early in life and ensuring the continued rapid growth of the population."

## NO REASON TO FEAR A FERTILITY 'CRASH'

And, although there is much talk in the media, and by billionaires who should know better, about the dire consequences of supposedly crashing fertility rates, the UN's figures reveal that our population will continue to grow for decades to come. In the UN's More Developed Regions, on average, the projections expect fertility rates to actually increase a little over the century. It is the populations of precisely these high income countries who are mainly driving climate change, biodiversity loss and resource depletion. Low fertility is good for us all.

When it comes to population, the best chance for the best future for all of us is bringing our population growth to an end – via committing to and investing in empowering, positive and voluntary population solutions – as soon as we can. That will not solve our problems, but it will mean that everything else we do to make our human world fairer and protect the natural world will be more effective.

## JOIN THE GLOBAL POPULATION CONVERSATION

### NIGERIA

The UN projects Nigeria’s population will more than double this century, increasing from 215m today to 374m in 2050 and 545m in 2100. It will overtake the USA to become the world’s third largest country in 2050.



*“Africa is the hotbed of massive population growth: Nigeria is on the frontline. Despite efforts to increase family planning in Nigeria, the number of women with unmet need is still high. Funding family planning will help slow the exponential growth rate and in turn help mitigate climate change.”*

Chidera Benoit, Executive Director of Population Explosion Awareness Initiative, Nigeria

### UGANDA

Uganda’s population will almost double over the next 30 years, rising from 46.6m in 2022 to 86.9m in 2050 and 131m in 2100.



*“This is the time when the population conversation matters most. When laws on women’s rights are being broken and women have no say on their bodies, then we need more support in gender empowerment, especially sexual and reproductive healthcare, and equitable life opportunities for girls and women. We also need to start addressing the connection between human population pressure and the extinction crisis.”*

Nyombi Morris, Ugandan climate campaigner, CNN Environmentalist of Tomorrow and PM Change Ambassador

### GUATEMALA

Guatemala’s population is projected to increase from 17.7m in 2022 to 24m in 2050.



*“Having many children during the reproductive life of a woman undoubtedly has an impact on her development, her possibility to earn a better income and her quality of life. With a smaller family, you won’t need more land to cultivate corn, you won’t cut down the forest. Our resources are connected to what we choose to do with our family size.”*

Bernarda Jimenez, Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator at WINGS Guatemala

### INDIA

India’s population will rise from 1.4bn today to 1.67bn in 2050 and peak in 2064 at just under 1.7bn.



*“Currently, about 9% of Indian women have an unmet need for contraception, which means that approximately 22 million women want to stop or delay childbearing but do not have access to a method of contraception.”*

Poonam Muttreja, Executive Director of the Population Foundation of India

## FIND OUT MORE

At Population Matters, we talk about population every day and the impact its continued growth has on people’s lives, the other species we share our planet with, climate change and environmental degradation. Be part of the population conversation by visiting [populationmatters.org/newsletter](https://populationmatters.org/newsletter) to receive campaign updates and information on how to support our work.



# OPENING UP THE POPULATION



Kenya was the focal point for a globally relevant conversation.

PM's **Robin Maynard** reports on the Population Conversation symposium, held in Kilifi, Kenya. The event brought together diverse stakeholders to identify the actions needed to mainstream the crucial 'population conversation'.

**BACK IN MARCH** I attended an incredibly inspiring event, organised by local public health consultancy WellSense and supported by PM, where I found common cause and shared understanding amongst, what seemed on paper, a challengingly diverse group of individuals, disciplines, and sectors. As it turned out, Kenya provided the focal point for a globally relevant conversation.

The 'conversation' actually started more than two years ago, when Dr Monique Oliff of WellSense, a small community health consultancy operating throughout sub-Saharan Africa, contacted me following media coverage of our 2019 World Population Day event, held in partnership with and at the invitation of the Nigerian Conservation Foundation.

Later the same year, when in Kenya for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD25),

my colleague Florence Blondel and I met with Monique. She took us into Nairobi's Kibera slum to meet community leaders and hear directly from women and girls whose lives were affected by lack of family planning choice. The seeds for organising a future event to open up the population conversation were sown. While Covid delayed our plans, the



The conversation continued at meal breaks.

additional time provided both greater funding and spread of participants who signed up to attend the event in Kilifi. These included soil scientists and water engineers, marine biologists, wildlife conflict managers, urban waste recyclers, girls' independence and rights enablers, family planning and maternal health providers, proponents of sustainable development and new economic models for improving people's wellbeing within natural resource boundaries – all adding to the flow of knowledge and experience.

Alongside leading academics from the Universities of Nairobi, Rwanda and Mombasa's technical college, grassroots workers and activists, working in some of the hardest pressed communities in Kenya, also contributed to the conversation.

Population growth and its impacts are very real for Kenyans, as Wendo Aszed, founder of Dandelion Africa and PM Empower to Plan partner, set out in her presentation. The country's current population is estimated to be around 56–58 million and is projected to increase to over 90 million by 2050, possibly hitting more than 125 million by the end of the century.

# CONVERSATION

## STORIES THAT DEMAND ACTION

Frederick Okinda from Komb Green Solutions, which PM has been proud to support through our Empower to Plan initiative, gave a powerful account of his personal journey from a life of criminality to setting up Komb Green to clean-up and ‘green’ the environment of Korogocho slum on the edge of Nairobi.

**This was a different and distinctive event. Not only because it brought together such a diverse cast of characters, but also because it saw us recognising the need to integrate the issue of population in our varied fields of work.**

He showed us slides of volunteers wading chest high into the Nairobi River to hook out waste and debris – including the bodies of over 40 fetuses from illegal, unsafe abortions, which they buried with love and dignity.

## NATURAL RESOURCES UNDER PRESSURE

Soil scientist, Dr Caroline Oukuro, observed that at the present population level, nearly 50% of Kenyans live below the poverty line. And, with 80% of the country categorised as Arid or Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL), and agriculture having to expand to feed the growing numbers of its citizens, whilst continuing to bring in 40% of Kenya’s foreign currency earnings, pressure on soils and water resources is increasing.

Something that did rightly upset us were the facts presented by Dr Job Makoyo, director of programmes and operations for Marie Stopes International Kenya. He revealed that each year, between 4,000 to 5,000 Kenyan women die in childbirth – “equivalent to 20

Boeing max 737s falling out of the sky, and yet where’s the outrage and action?” And, with 43% of pregnancies unplanned and only 53% of Kenyans using modern family planning methods, many of those unwanted pregnancies and deaths were preventable.

Notably, this was and is an initiative arising from and generated in Africa by Africans. Whilst PM provided information resources, contacts and the seed-corn funding, the lion’s share of the work was delivered by our Kenyan partners. This was a different and distinctive event. Not only because it brought together such a diverse cast of characters, but also because it saw us all engaging openly and honestly in a conversation that led to the signing of a shared, unifying statement (see panel), recognising the need to integrate the issue of population in our varied fields of work.

## POPULATION GROWTH IS A BARRIER TO DEVELOPMENT

The last word goes to Dr Dieudonee Muhoza from the University of Rwanda, who set out the extraordinary progress Rwanda has made since the genocide of 1994 when over one million people were massacred. Rwanda’s population density, amongst the highest in Africa at that time, is cited as a factor. In 2005, the government introduced its Vision 2020, which “recognised population growth as a major barrier to the country’s development.”

Use of family planning, which the government saw as a “central component of a healthy and sustainable society” has increased from just 8% in 2000 to nearly 60% today. In addition, child mortality has halved, and Rwandan women are having, on average, just under four children. If that progress is sustained, Rwanda will, by 2030, have achieved the demographic conditions necessary for accelerated economic growth. Dr Muhoza stated: “Family planning in Rwanda is not seen as population control, but rather as a way to empower the people”. I couldn’t have put it better myself.



Dr John Mushomi of Makerere University, Uganda.

## THE POPULATION CONVERSATION UNIFYING STATEMENT

We believe that the issue of human population is a critical factor which influences, impacts upon and is relevant to all our concerns as individuals and organisations representing and working on:

- Human rights and women’s empowerment – including family planning/contraceptive choice
- Sustainable economic development and wellbeing, especially at the community and grassroots level
- Social justice
- Faith, religious and cultural matters
- Conservation, environmental and wildlife issues

### Researchers and academia

We also believe that addressing the overconsumption of resources, production of waste, and the inequity inherent in those globally is an inseparable part of the population conversation. We are committed to taking forward and developing this conversation, as we believe it is of critical importance for Kenya, for Africa, and indeed for the world.

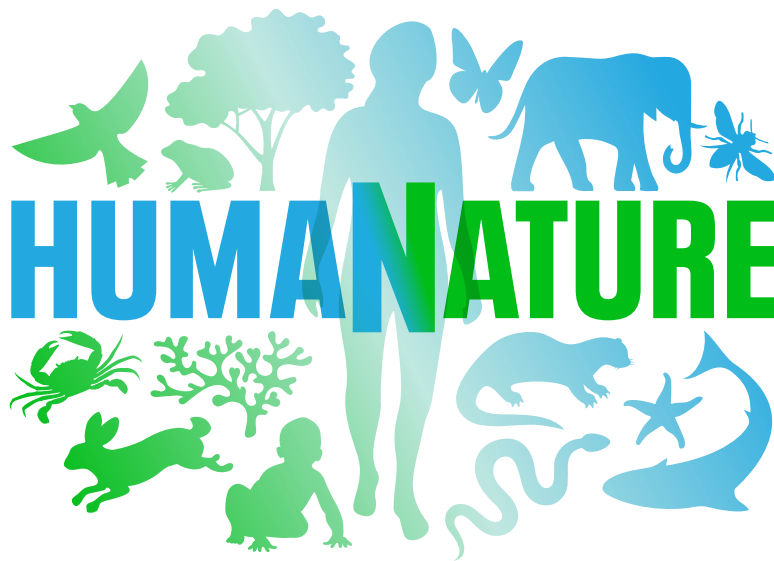
Find out how you can support us at [populationmatters.org/take-action](https://populationmatters.org/take-action)

# Protecting nature, enhancing lives

PM's **Andrew Howard** provides an update on PM's positive actions for biodiversity.

**FROM ICONIC MAMMALS** such as tigers and polar bears to the tiniest plants and insects, the Earth's biodiversity is under increasing pressure from human-induced threats, driven by population growth.

To mark International Day for Biological Diversity on 22 May, PM launched its new, overarching biodiversity campaign online. The HUMANATURE campaign aims to highlight humankind's relationship with nature and the adverse impact of our growing numbers on it. It also emphasises that we humans must see ourselves as an integral part of nature, not separate from or superior to it.



## AT ONE WITH NATURE

Going forward, the campaign will include a range of issues and actions – some already established and ongoing, and some new – to inspire people to help protect biodiversity, tackle human population growth, and live more sustainably in harmony with nature.

A key focus will be on the positive solutions and actions – at international, national and local levels – that individuals, communities, organisations, governments and others can enact and take to ensure that humanity's impact on nature is positive and sustainable.

## LOCAL ACTION FOR INSECTS

Insects, crucial for all life on Earth, including humans, are in decline across the world due to a range of human-induced factors, such as habitat loss, climate change and pesticide use, all driven by human population growth.

Our first HUMANATURE campaign initiative, *Insect Populations Matter*, provided PM supporters and the public with 10 suggestions for taking action locally to protect insects and their habitats. These ranged from sowing native wildflowers and not mowing lawns to building bug hotels and lobbying local councils to allow parts of towns and cities to grow wild, and have been received very positively.

PM is also supporting a parliamentary petition entitled *Save the bees: cut hazardous pesticides and support nature-friendly farming*. To add your name,

visit [populationmatters.org/take-action-protect-insects-pesticides](https://populationmatters.org/take-action-protect-insects-pesticides).

## INTERNATIONAL BIODIVERSITY

Looking at the bigger picture, the negotiations on the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), the international plan to combat biodiversity loss, continued in Geneva in March and Nairobi in June.

**We humans must see ourselves as an integral part of nature, not separate from or superior to it.**

Working with partners, including the University of Cambridge Conservation Leadership Alumni Network (UCCLAN), PM lobbied key countries and other stakeholders to ensure that all direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss, including human population growth, are included in the final deal.

These efforts will continue until the GBF is adopted by the world's nations at the COP15 biodiversity conference in Montreal in December. PM will then lobby certain national governments to deal with population growth issues as they implement the GBF through their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.

## PM promotes positive solutions



As the HUMANATURE campaign develops, PM will be promoting more solutions to protect nature and enhance people's lives. Look out for more on:

- Agricultural expansion (particularly livestock farming), driven by the need to feed ever more people and to satisfy our growing demand for meat and dairy products. Agriculture is the main cause of habitat destruction, particularly deforestation, and biodiversity loss.
- The threat of drought and desertification, driven by climate change and population growth.
- Indigenous peoples' practices around protecting biodiversity, and how we can learn from them to help us all live more sustainably.
- The Population Health Environment (PHE) development model, which integrates conservation with action to promote the wellbeing of human communities, and empowerment and family planning to reduce population pressures on biodiversity where people live.

With the global human population predicted to reach 8 billion in November this year, and 9.7 billion in 2050, PM's work highlighting the impact of our numbers on biodiversity could not be more important. Find out more at [populationmatters.org/humanature](https://populationmatters.org/humanature)



# Powering positive change



PM's Empower to Plan Project Coordinator, **Catriona Spaven-Donn**, reports on the latest initiatives your donations are supporting.

**GLOBALLY, SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE** rights continue to be denied: the USA has overturned the right to abortion while around half of all pregnancies across the world are unwanted. Our Empower to Plan programme is, however, testament to the positive change that happens when communities mobilise to provide essential healthcare and education services and ensure that women's and girls' rights are met.

Our grassroots funding programme is currently partnering with organisations in Afghanistan, India and Venezuela to support and develop projects in family planning, sex education and environmental regeneration.

## Rajasthan Rising, India



Photo courtesy of Rajasthan Rising

This Indian collective of over 5,000 adolescent girls mobilising for their right to education is going from strength to strength. With your support, we have enabled Rajasthan Rising's most recent series of leadership trainings in sexual and reproductive rights and climate justice, engaging 17 girls from rural areas of Rajasthan,

who in turn have reached a further 225 girls through their social change projects. These projects have had powerful outcomes, such as blocking a number of child marriages, re-enrolling girls in school and ensuring village access to sanitary napkins. Empower to Plan funds have also facilitated 100 community meetings, reaching over 550 people for dialogue and awareness-raising on child marriage and girls' education.

One participant, 16-year-old Saira, says: "I am part of this training to fulfil my mission of stopping child marriages in my district." When Saira's father lost his job as a labourer at the start of the Covid pandemic, the family didn't have enough money to support their six children.

Against her will, Saira was forced to get married. She felt powerless until she met Vineeta Meena, recipient of our 2022 Young Campaigner Change Champion Award (see pages 8-9), who recruited Saira as a girl leader and helped to convince her father that she should finish her studies.

Saira is now studying in her penultimate year of high school, with the goal of ensuring no other girl gets married at a young age without their consent.

## Turimiquire Foundation, Venezuela



Photo courtesy of the Turimiquire Foundation

Our new partner, the Turimiquire Foundation in Venezuela, is filling the gaps in the national healthcare system by providing family planning services for women from Sucre state. We are crowdfunding to cover the cost of 40 sex education sessions in six schools, engaging young people on contraceptive methods and strengthening the organisation's family planning programmes. **Please donate at: [populationmatters.org/turimiquire-foundation](https://populationmatters.org/turimiquire-foundation)**

## AFGA, Afghanistan

Empower to Plan is committed to partnering with organisations working in the most challenging circumstances for the realisation of sexual and reproductive rights. Turn page 19 to hear from Mariam Pamiri, one of the Kabul-based midwives and family planning counsellors hired by the Afghan Family Guidance Association (AFGA) with Empower to Plan funds. **Please donate at: [populationmatters.org/afghan-family-guidance-association](https://populationmatters.org/afghan-family-guidance-association)**

PM's innovative **Empower to Plan** scheme uses the power of crowdfunding to support grassroots NGOs that work to improve the lives of women, girls and communities and protect the natural world. Find out more at [populationmatters.org/empower-to-plan](https://populationmatters.org/empower-to-plan). Also check out our Empower to Plan video at [youtube.com/watch?v=MijvXkqMwcs](https://youtube.com/watch?v=MijvXkqMwcs).



# Brave new world?

A future where the success of the economy is measured in terms of wellbeing instead of GDP growth, and planetary boundaries are not surpassed, were topics under discussion at the Planetary Futures conference. PM's **Monica Scigliano** was there.



There's much to be learned from Costa Rica's approach.

Photo by Birger Strahl on Unsplash

**IN MY ROLE** as Population Matters' Researcher and Policy Adviser, in June I travelled to Finland to present a paper at the Planetary Futures of Health and Wellbeing conference. The conference was organised by the Finland Futures Research Centre at the University of Turku. Futures studies is a very inter-disciplinary field, and this year the conference theme centred on the linkages between environmental sustainability and human wellbeing.

## NATURE IS A KEY RESOURCE

Among the many interesting presentations, the highlight was Dr Liisa Tyrvaïnen's presentation about the myriad ways that nature benefits people. Given her base in Finland, much of her research was specifically about the power of forests.

In addition to removing carbon from the air and providing a home for other species, forests decrease people's stress levels, improve immune systems, and even increase attention spans. In other words, nature is a key resource for public health: providing more green space could prevent 43,000 deaths each year in Europe. Dr Tyrvaïnen pointed out that population and consumption growth have driven deforestation, hurting not just animals but humans. She and other speakers noted that the ill effects of nature depletion are most felt in cities, which will house 70% of the world's population by 2050.

## HAPPY PLANET?

In my paper, I argued that a future in which planetary boundaries are not surpassed, and in which all people have decent lives, requires both economic transformation and population stabilisation. The constant pursuit of economic growth – to which population growth contributes – is incompatible with environmental sustainability and

does not make the average person better off. A wellbeing economy, instead of measuring success with GDP growth, uses metrics such as the Happy Planet Index, which takes into account subjective wellbeing, life expectancy, and Ecological Footprint. However, without also stabilising population growth, even a wellbeing economy will struggle to deliver sustainability.

Costa Rica, for example, has made incredible achievements in protecting

reproductive health services, which are key to ending population growth.

## WELLBEING AND SUSTAINABILITY

Attending the conference was a great opportunity to learn more about Finland, which is a wellbeing economy exemplar. Along with Scotland, Wales, Iceland, and New Zealand, it forms the Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership (unsurprisingly, the leaders of almost all these countries are women!). In chatting

Costa Rica has made incredible achievements in protecting its nature while also improving quality of life for its people, and tops the Happy Planet Index.

its nature while also improving quality of life for its people, and tops the Happy Planet Index. Nonetheless, it still surpasses planetary boundaries and has an unsustainable per capita Footprint.

Fortunately, a wellbeing economy can contribute to slowing population growth because of its emphasis on universal services such as healthcare. With quality universal healthcare, a country is better equipped to deliver sexual and



Finland – ranked the world's happiest country.

with Finnish participants, I could see why Finland has been ranked the world's happiest country for five years in a row. Social connections are strong, nature is abundant, the pace of life is a bit slower, and people trust the government to take care of their needs. Gender equality – a metric associated with smaller families – is also high.

On the sustainability side, however, Finland is far from perfect. Its per capita Ecological Footprint, at 6.4, is significantly higher than that of the UK. Because of its small population and large land area, Finland still has a biocapacity reserve, but its high consumption rates still contribute to global environmental crises. Nonetheless, Finland's government is pursuing policies to decrease its impact on the environment, and its small population and low growth rate will make that goal much easier.



Delegates at the conference had much to discuss.

# Q&A with Mariam Pamiri

**Mariam Pamiri** is one of three midwives recruited by the Afghan Family Guidance Association (AFGA) with **Empower to Plan** funds. Educated at university in Kabul, she is currently working there in a public hospital, providing family planning counselling sessions in one of AFGA's clinics.

**Q: What kind of services do you offer in AFGA's family planning counselling clinics?**

**A:** Primarily, we focus on family planning and contraceptive methods. We also have a holistic approach to sexual and reproductive health services and offer HIV and STI screening, mammograms, antenatal and postnatal care, and address urology and subfertility.

**Q: What difference does it make to the lives of women and girls in Afghanistan to have access to family planning?**

**A:** I believe family planning makes a great difference. The Afghan women who have access to family planning counselling and services benefit from staying protected from unwanted pregnancies, especially as abortion is not allowed due to social and religious norms in Afghanistan. We also advise on birth spacing, which is necessary for the physical and mental health of both mothers and children. For younger women, we also help in providing advice and counselling on menstrual cycles and planning around the number of children they will have as well as the spacing between them.

**Q: What are some of the current challenges you are dealing with at AFGA?**

**A:** While people can still access health services for the time being, it isn't the same as before. Women have been told that they shouldn't go out without a *mahram* (male chaperone). They still come, because it is necessary and

they need these health services, but the situation has changed. There is currently a shortage of medicines on the market so we hope that there will not be further restrictions imposed on sourcing medication. We are dealing with a series of different challenges, but AFGA is operational. We are also about to extend our operations in the areas affected by the devastating June earthquake in the east of the country.

**Q: What are your hopes for the future?**

**A:** I hope that AFGA will be able to expand its services in more provinces of the country and increase these to even more communities. For myself, I want to serve my fellow Afghans even better in the future and reach a bigger number of Afghans with my expertise – to meet and convince those people who do not yet accept family planning methods.

**Q: How can the international community continue to support AFGA's work?**

**A:** We are grateful to Population Matters, which has enabled AFGA to provide more family planning clinics in Kabul. The international community can continue to support AFGA through providing ideas and telling the world about our work. With more funding, we will also be able to provide more health service points and finance the salaries of more health service providers who are at the frontline of crucial community work.

■ For more about our partners, visit [populationmatters.org/empower-to-plan](https://populationmatters.org/empower-to-plan)



Mariam and the team at AFGA hope to expand its services to reach more communities.



Photos courtesy of AFGA

## Meeting the needs of communities in Afghanistan

■ Since 1968, AFGA has been working to ensure stigma- and discrimination-free reproductive health and rights for Afghans by empowering women, young people and communities to make informed decisions. Forced to close during the first Taliban takeover from the late 1990s until 2002, AFGA has since been working non-stop, serving around two million Afghans every year.

■ AFGA runs nine clinics, providing integrated sexual and reproductive health services, including for post-abortion treatments and survivors of gender-based violence. The organisation reaches those with least access to these medical services through two mobile clinics.

■ From January to November 2021, AFGA offered 1,927,159 individual medical services through their static and mobile clinics and 226,517 services through their Community Outreach Midwife programme to communities across 11 provinces of Afghanistan.

■ Since the Taliban authorities took over in August 2021, restrictions on women's and girls' rights continue to be imposed. The former Ministry of Women's Affairs has been replaced by the Taliban's 'Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice', which polices women's movement, occupation and dress.

■ The UNFPA Afghanistan Humanitarian Appeal estimates the potential impact of inaction on maternal health and family planning as resulting in 4.8 million unwanted pregnancies and drastic increases in maternal mortality rates and unmet need for family planning across the population.

■ According to the International Planned Parenthood Foundation (IPPF), one of AFGA's core funders, one in eight Afghan women have a lifetime risk of maternal death, while 28% of children die before their fifth birthday.



**When it comes  
to our human  
population on this  
one, habitable planet**



# LESS IS MORE

**More space for nature,  
for other species, for  
life-supporting ecosystems.**

**More opportunity,  
increased wellbeing  
and fairer shares for  
people everywhere.**



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Population Matters campaigns to achieve a sustainable human population, to protect the natural world and improve people's lives. We support human rights, women's empowerment and global justice. We believe that to be able to live within our planet's limits, everyone should be able to choose a smaller family.



TM

**Every choice counts**