

POPULATION MATTERS

Spring 2023

Issue 42

What a girl wants

PM Choice Ambassador Joan Kembabazi is campaigning for a world in which every girl has the opportunity to achieve her full potential

The day the 8 billionth baby was born

This symbolic moment provided a chance to spark conversations across the world

Why we don't buy it

Overconsumption on a planet with 8 billion people has huge implications for us all

**POPULATION
MATTERS**

TM

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

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

Design, infographics & illustrations: Miller Design






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Population Matters Magazine is produced twice a year by Population Matters, The Chandlery, 50 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7QY

Registered charity: 1114109 Tel: 020 8123 9116
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WORLD POPULATION THIS ISSUE: 8,036,021,800

In this issue...

3 [From the Director](#)

Robin Maynard reports on a growing awareness of the positive contribution population solutions such as educating girls and contraceptive choice can bring.

4 [News round-up](#)

PM stirs things up at the UN, plus our new community fundraising programme.

6 [Planning for all our futures](#)

Alistair Currie reports on the 2022 International Conference on Family Planning.

8 [Gender equality – in 86 years](#)

Full gender equality is unlikely to be achieved until 2108. PM's **Ben Stallworthy** asks, what's slowing down progress?

9 [My message to world leaders](#)

Activist and PM Choice Ambassador, **Joan Kembabazi**, is tired of waiting for action on global funding for girls' education.

10 [8 billion hopes? 8 billion dreams? 8 billion possibilities?](#)

PM's **Florence Blondel** looks at the reality of the population issue.

12 [Objects of desire](#)

Driving a desire for consumption is killing our planet. That's why ***We Don't Buy It***.

14 [Our water-stressed world](#)

At the first UN Water Conference for more than 40 years, PM was there to raise the issue of the impact of our human numbers.

16 [A job or a child?](#)

Indian campaigner, **Debanjana Choudhury**, investigates some disturbing developments.

17 [Amplifying young voices](#)

PM's **Izi Clery** has news of an exciting initiative in Albania, supported by Empower to Plan.

18 [Noble ambitions](#)

But can the new Global Biodiversity Framework save the natural world?

19 [Q&A](#)

With **Erfaan Hussein Babak** of The Awakening, an organisation focused on empowering girls and boys in Pakistan.



4



6



10



17

From the Director

Our attendance at a range of conferences, including two at the UN, has revealed a growing awareness of the positive contribution that the population solutions of educating girls and contraceptive choice can bring.



I'M WRITING THIS before heading up to the 'Extinction or Regeneration' conference organised by Compassion in World Farming (CIWF) at which PM will have a stand. CIWF is a 'rare breed' amongst the conservation and environment organisations based in the Global North that 'get' and will talk publicly about the population factor.

Their chief executive, Phil Lymbery, spoke at PM's 2019 conference on biodiversity, *'The Last Elephant in the Room'*, highlighting the connection between human population growth and the ever-expanding number of intensively farmed livestock worldwide. For every one billion additional people coming onto our planet, Phil informed us, 10 times that number of animals are farmed each year for human consumption.

RECOGNISING THE LINK

It is notable that an organisation concerned with the rights and wellbeing of other species recognises that link – and that concern about human population growth is fundamentally about improving the rights and wellbeing of people and planet. Particularly of those currently with the least power and choice – women and girls. One in five women

in the world are married before the age of 18, rising to a shocking one in three in the poorest countries – the same countries where a third of all girls aged between 10 and 19 have never attended school.

This reality is highlighted by our Choice Ambassador, Joan Kembabazi, (page 9) reinforced from the personal experience of her childhood best friend, married off at just 13 and dying in childbirth. Joan states simply: *"Without the education of girls, a sustainable future remains beyond our reach."*

Harsh realities and injustices for which there are available, affordable solutions (just \$10 will provide one woman's annual family planning needs). Solutions, which our teams sought to communicate at the three other conferences PM attended over

There are available, affordable solutions to the harsh realities and injustices faced by many. Solutions which our teams sought to communicate at the conferences PM attended over recent months.

recent months – the *'International Conference on Family Planning'* in Thailand in November, then, this spring, at two UN conferences held at its New York HQ. The first of these was about the critical resource of water, followed by one on population and development.

Noticeable across all three (see the reports on pages 4, 6-7, and 14-15), was the welcome awareness amongst some participants of the connection between the population factor and their particular concerns, and the positive contribution that the population solutions of educating girls and contraceptive choice can bring.

As Dr Amrita Namasivayam, a former research fellow for Project Drawdown, which evaluates all viable

climate change solutions, said: *"We cannot ignore population dynamics when it comes to climate change... human rights and full bodily autonomy are fundamental and planetary benefits are positive ripple effects of access and agency."*

THE CONSUMPTION FACTOR

Nor can we ignore the factor of consumption, especially the high per capita consumption in richer, developed countries like the UK.

Our recent campaign *'We Don't Buy It'* challenges Apple's fueling of such hyper-consumerism through pushing annual upgrades of its smart phones, encouraging the discarding of last year's model, despite having more capability than most people will ever use, and driving the relentless extraction of natural resources. Not least, linking back to that UN water conference, the use of over 100 billion gallons of water annually to produce hundreds of thousands of products a day – a third of that gluttonous corporate gulping of water happening in countries already facing water scarcity.

Accompanying me to CIWF's conference will be our iconic statue, 'Big Foot', made-up of a matrix of hundreds of steel baby silhouettes welded together, who stands atop a stressed globe oozing oil and other resources, looking down in surprise at the sole of his oversized foot covered in squashed biodiversity.

Big Foot symbolises both the excess consumption of those with the biggest, heaviest global footprint and the excess weight of our species collectively on our planet. We hope his presence will provoke more people to have meaningful conversations about population.

Robin Maynard

Executive Director, Population Matters



Population Matters news round-up

“Every kind of solution is with us, but we are too slow to act.”

This April, PM was honoured to take part in the UN’s Commission for Population and Development (CPD) session for the first time ever. Under discussion was the vital impact that investing in quality education has on promoting opportunity and prosperity, advancing gender equality and ensuring environmental sustainability.

Currently, almost a quarter of a billion children worldwide are not in school. Therefore, the 56th CPD session’s theme – population, education, and sustainable development – could not have been more appropriate. According to Dr Julitta Onabanjo, Technical Division Director of the UNFPA (the UN’s sexual and reproductive health agency), education was put in the spotlight because the climate issue will force 12.5 million girls out of school in around seven years. She stated: “Girls are

sadly the most affected. They are vulnerable to child marriage and exposed to gender-based violence. Girls start pregnancy early and get all sorts of complications.”

The CPD’s primary role is implementing the family planning and women’s empowerment Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The ICPD is under the auspices of the United Nations’ Economic and Social Council – ECOSOC. In 2022, Population Matters obtained consultative status with ECOSOC and so we were delighted to attend this year’s event in New York in an official capacity.

Across five days, we built new connections, gained knowledge that will aid our campaigns, and provided PM Choice Ambassador, Ugandan climate change activist Nyombi Morris, with a chance to speak. In an impassioned plea,



PM’s Communications Officer Florence Blondel with Dr Julitta Onabanjo.



Nyombi Morris, a PM Choice Ambassador, pushed for re-integrating adolescent mums in schools.

he urged: “56 years is a long time – we cannot wait for CPD100 for each of us to improve, provide evidence, or come up with solutions to improve the lives of the world’s underserved population when the number keeps going up. Every kind of solution is with us, but we are too slow to act.”

■ You can read the full report in the NEWS section at populationmatters.org.

Apple by numbers

Our new report – *iCon: Apple, consumption and the future of the planet* – examines the evidence that excessive consumption is driving climate change, extinctions and exhaustion of resources. The findings include:

- Apple persuades customers to buy more than 1 million iPhones every 2 days. More than 6 billion people use smartphones, which is over 80% of the global population.
- At 23 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent, Apple’s carbon footprint is greater than that of 70 nation-states.
- The cost of a new iPhone could buy 200 long-lasting mosquito nets to protect children from malaria or pay the salary of a midwife in Bangladesh for four months.
- Apple’s supply chain uses more than 100 billion gallons of water a year: more than a third of its corporate use comes from areas at high water risk.
- The raw materials and components used in Apple products are extracted and transported from more than 75 countries.

Sources for this fully referenced report are available at populationmatters.org/news/2023/03/the-real-cost-of-an-iphone

Upgrade your home, not your phone

As part of our *We Don’t Buy It campaign* and to mark Black Friday (AKA Buy Nothing Day), last November PM took the overconsumption message to Apple’s flagship UK store on Regent Street in London.

Volunteers from Population Matters’ London Group stood with an oversized smartphone with the aim of fostering dialogue about individual and collective consumption, and how pervasive the idea has become that newer is better.

While a number of passers-by were enthusiastic in their support for our action, relatively few shoppers engaged with us or took leaflets, emphasising how much work is needed to address societal norms of consumption.



Find out about our new report into consumption and the future of the planet on page 12 >>

Polarised access to contraception in Europe

Photo by Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition on Unsplash



Did you know that 36% of pregnancies in Europe are unintended? And that 28 European countries offer little or no reimbursement for contraception?

According to a new report from the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and

Reproductive Rights (EPF), access to contraceptives in Europe remains “very uneven”. The EPF’s *Contraception Policy Atlas*, which rates 46 countries, shows that the best performers (the UK, France and Belgium) have general coverage schemes within their national health services, special arrangements for young and vulnerable people, accessible and free consultations and excellent government-supported websites.

By contrast, the poorer performers (Poland, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Hungary) have consultations that are not or are insufficiently covered by the health system and no government-supported websites. (Check out our *Gilead Watch at populationmatters.org*). Reports such as the EPF’s *Contraception Policy Atlas* do a great job of highlighting the issue, but what next? While Poland came out bottom of the pile (33.5%), it was good to hear that EPF’s executive director, Neil Datta, has been invited to present his findings to the Polish Parliament. We can only hope that engaging in such a dialogue with decision-makers helps to improve contraception access there.

■ PM was a sponsor of the International Conference on Family Planning. Find out more on page 6 >>

IPCC’s final warning

Photo by Tobias Rademacher on Unsplash



The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has published comprehensive reviews of scientific knowledge on global heating for more than three decades. The latest report from the world’s foremost body of

experts has been described as a “*final warning*.”

At the current rate of greenhouse gas emissions, the world will use up its remaining carbon budget for limiting global temperature rises to 1.5°C before the next IPCC report is due in 2030. Beyond the 1.5°C warming threshold, damage to the climate is expected to rapidly escalate and become irreversible.

■ We all need to up our game in the fight for climate justice. Find out how you can get involved by visiting populationmatters.org/campaigns.



Photo by Noah Stillman on Unsplash

Spring into action!

We recently began a community fundraising programme to enable our members and supporters to engage with our work more directly by raising sponsorship and awareness on our behalf. Earth Day in April and the International Day for Biological Diversity in May bookended our 2023 Spring Action Month – and we hope you’ll feel inspired to get involved in future events.

You can set up your own personal fundraising page on our website, just like PM supporters and marathon runners Michael and Dom (pictured right), or John, who took on a fell walk with his two daughters to raise awareness of the population issue. Other ways to raise funds could include hosting a bake sale, or having a spring clear out and donating the proceeds to PM.



Michael Walker, who is running the Two Tunnels Marathon in Bath, UK, this August, says: “*The natural world is incredible. We must achieve a sustainable human population to live in harmony with it. Support Population Matters with me, and fight for the future of this planet.*” Find out more at populationmatters.org/fundraise-for-us.

How your feedback helps shape our work

Thank you to everyone who took part in our latest annual survey. More than 1,200 of you provided feedback on our activities.



We’re pleased to report that 82% continue to be ‘very satisfied’ or ‘somewhat satisfied’ with their experience of Population Matters. Top issues of concern remain global population growth (see pages 10-11), biodiversity (page 18), and climate change. Where possible, we continue to undertake work on the issues that matter to you. For example, last year we identified a growing interest across our supporter base to learn more about sustainable living and consumption. In response, we launched our *We Don’t Buy It* campaign, dedicated to the issue of overconsumption – which we know goes hand-in-hand with population – and a new report: *iCon: Apple, consumption and the future of our planet* (featured on pages 12-13).

EMPOWERMENT AS A CLIM

Population Matters was a sponsor of the **2022 International Conference on Family Planning**. PM's Alistair Currie shares some of the highlights.

LAST NOVEMBER, a community of 3,500 people – including a small team from Population Matters – travelled from across the world to come together in Pattaya City, Thailand, calling for family planning as a vital component of universal healthcare. Like Population Matters, ICFP highlights the crucial role of gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights in achieving a better future for all.

Over the course of four intensive days, hundreds of events were organised, showcasing the work of scientists, policymakers, practitioners and youth leaders. We engaged in conversations around safe abortion care, family planning and climate change, adolescent sex education and men and boys' involvement in family planning.

At our own, PM-hosted side event, we heard about the cascading benefits of family planning and comprehensive quality healthcare for women's rights, community development and environmental conservation. In the Philippines, for example, a country where almost a third of the population is under 15 years old, PATH Foundation Philippines Inc (PFPI) is working with women in traditional fishing communities to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Dr Joan Castro of PFPI told us: *"Women and fisher households are experiencing the effects of climate change... the most affected will be the next generation, especially large families with low and no stable income, and women and children... Population, sexual and reproductive health and rights, health, environment and climate change are all interrelated and interdependent issues."*

PFPI have found that for the communities they work with, integrating these components into local, community-based programmes has a positive impact on food security, poverty alleviation, sustainable livelihoods and human-ecosystem health.

POPULATION PRESSURE PUTS PEOPLE AT RISK

Highlighting the correlation between areas of high climate vulnerability, limited years of education and high unmet need for family planning, Hannah Evans from Population Connection emphasised the importance of sexual and reproductive rights and health for all of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

She stated: *"Population pressures worsen the impacts of climate change and put more people at risk. Slowing population growth through investments in sustainable development – including health and education for women and girls – will positively affect efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change and will increase resilience. Increased funding for comprehensive reproductive healthcare is needed to expand human rights, sustainable development and climate adaptation worldwide."*

We also heard from Dr Sanghamitra Singh from the Population Foundation of India about the harm of embedded social norms for achieving human rights and sustainable

development. She reflected on the fact that in India, these norms often inhibit women from having the liberty or independence to decide if, when and how many children they want to have, citing population decline – and the benefits it brings for health and wellbeing – as being inevitable when women are given choices over their bodies: *"We must continue to denounce coercive population control methods; they are not ethical, not rights-based and simply not necessary."* (Turn to page 16 for Debanjana Choudhury's report on coercive policies in India).

Dr Amrita Namasivayam of Halycon Consulting presented to a packed room on empowerment as a climate solution. As one of its research fellows, she highlighted the findings of Project Drawdown – a leading resource for climate solutions – which states that family planning and education

"Population, sexual and reproductive health and rights, health, environment and climate change are all interrelated and interdependent issues."

**Dr Joan Castro of
PATH Foundation
Philippines Inc**

CLIMATE SOLUTION



Gender and sexual and reproductive rights expert Debanjana Choudhuri (right) with PM's Catriona Spaven-Donn and Alistair Currie.



combined is one of the most powerful tools available to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and control global warming, as a result of its impact reducing population growth. Dr Namasivayam urged: *“We cannot ignore population dynamics when it comes to climate change... human rights and full bodily autonomy are fundamental and planetary benefits are positive ripple effects of access and agency.”*

RECOGNISING THE LINK BETWEEN CLIMATE CHANGE AND POPULATION

We were also galvanised by voices from the Sahel Region, an area whose population is projected to more than double by 2050. Sani Ayouba, Founder and Director of the Niger arm of Jeunes Volontaires pour l’Environnement, an African youth-led environmental organisation, presented passionately on the need to incorporate family planning into national climate adaptation plans: *“Climate change and population are difficult conversations, but youth get it... the linkages need to be made!”*

We also met our friends and Empower to Plan partner, the Afghan Family Guidance Association, who talked about the need to protect reproductive liberation through their lifesaving healthcare programmes in Afghanistan, including the midwife family planning counselling programme that Population Matters has supported.

As the groundswell of committed activists and practitioners grows in response to our multifaceted global crises, we continue to see the value and necessity of breaking down siloes. Alongside our friends and partners, we were able to ensure that the world’s foremost conference on family planning highlighted the intersections of sexual and reproductive health and rights, the wellbeing of people and planet and better futures for us all.

Hot topics of debate

In our ICFP Live Event, which was broadcast live on YouTube, we continued to delve into the issue of nationalist pressure on reproductive rights. Alistair Currie presented PM’s *Welcome to Gilead* report and also addressed the current context of shutdowns on women’s basic rights in places including Hungary, Iran and China in order to increase the birth rate, stating: *“These coercive policies not only abuse individuals’ rights but fail to achieve their intended goals. No evidence has demonstrated their effectiveness.”*

PM friend and Director of US-based Population Balance, Nandita Bajaj, won acclaim in the ICFP Closing Ceremony for her Live Event on the same issue, *Challenging Pronatalism is Key to Advancing Reproductive Liberation and Planetary Health*.

Our side event focused on the intersections of reproductive rights, environmental action and human and planetary wellbeing, looking at *Population, Health and Environment (PHE)* and *Population, Environment and Development (PED)* approaches in practice.

■ **FIND OUT MORE** about population growth and its impacts on nature, climate change and our demand for the Earth’s resources with PM’s interactive online tool populationmatters.org/population-explorer.

Gender equality? Not in our lifetime

The **Gender Snapshot 2022** reveals that gender equality will not be achieved by the intended deadline of 2030 – and this goal is unlikely to be reached for another 86 years, reports PM's **Ben Stallworthy**.



Photo by Jessica Podraza on Unsplash

AS WE APPROACH the halfway mark between the adoption of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 and the target of 2030, a new report has been released jointly by UN Women and UN Department of Economic & Social Affairs tracking the progress toward gender equality (SDG5) – and it makes for grim reading. At the current rate of progress, full gender equality will not be achieved until 2108.

WHY GENDER EQUALITY IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE PLANET

The UN's 17 SDGs are a framework to achieve decent lives for all on a healthy planet by 2030. While Gender Equality is the explicit target of SDG5, the need to improve the lives of women and children is clearly also essential to each of the other 16 goals – which is why the findings of this new report are so disappointing. As Ashley Judd, actor and UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador has stated: *“If we invest in girls and women, the world and all of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals will advance forward rapidly as a result.”*

In 2022, Project Drawdown, which compares the effectiveness of different measures to curb climate change, showed that educating girls and securing women's voluntary right to high-quality family planning together could reduce atmospheric CO₂ by 68.9 gigatonnes by 2050, making this one of the most powerful solutions to climate change.

WHAT'S SLOWING DOWN PROGRESS?

The report attributes the slow progress to factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic, conflict and climate change – and also notes the recent backlash towards women's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) around the world.

The lack of progress is clear – 12% of all women and girls aged 15–49 were sexually and/or physically assaulted

by an intimate partner last year. Child marriage is still rife, and we would need to make progress at 17 times the rate of the previous decade to meet the 2030 target. In 2021, nearly 1 in 5 women aged 20–24 was married before turning 18.

It is critical that we rally now to invest in women and girls to reclaim and accelerate progress. The longer we take to reverse this trend, the more it will cost us all.

Sima Bahous, Executive Director at UN Women

Sima Bahous, Executive Director at UN Women, commented: *“It is critical that we rally now to invest in women and girls to reclaim and accelerate progress. The data shows undeniable regressions in their lives made worse by the global crises – in incomes, safety, education and health. The longer we take to reverse this trend, the more it will cost us all.”*

The correlation between high-quality and longer education for women and girls and their quality of life is plain to see, yet there are still enormous gender disparities, and it's even worse for those from poor households and rural areas. By the end of 2022, 383 million women and girls will live in extreme poverty, compared to 368 million men and boys. It is also projected that more people in sub-Saharan Africa will live in extreme poverty by 2030 than today, a problem exacerbated by population increase.

Disturbingly, another key report issued by the UN finds that human development is falling behind in 90% of countries. *The Human Development Report 2021/2022*

finds that for the first time in 32 years, progress has reversed for two years in a row. In the sobering words of the UN's press release, the report *“paints a picture of a global society lurching from crisis to crisis, and which risks heading towards increasing deprivation and injustice.”* As ever, such reversals almost always hit women and girls hardest.

The report is further proof of a worrying trend around the world where there has been a backlash against women's SRHR. In some cases, this is driven or influenced by concerns about population growth and is intended to apply pressure on women to have more babies. In the light of these latest findings, now, more than ever, global cooperation, partnerships and significant investment in the gender equality agenda are all essential if things are to get back on track. Achieving gender equality will make the world a healthier, happier place and is crucial to making lasting environmental progress.

Population Matters is documenting vital evidence in the fight for gender equality

■ In 2021, Population Matters released *Welcome to Gilead*, an original report that examines how policymakers across the world are promoting and implementing policies to increase birth rates that abuse women's reproductive rights because of fears of population decline.

■ We're keeping track of all the latest developments that are restricting reproductive rights, which you can check out by searching for 'Gilead Watch' at populationmatters.org.



“Without the education of girls, a sustainable future remains beyond our reach.”

Joan Kembabazi is a girls’ and women’s rights activist and a campaigner against child marriage. She’s also a **Population Matters Choice Ambassador**, with a powerful message for world leaders...

I AM THE FOUNDER and CEO of Gufasha Girls Foundation, a community-based organisation in Uganda committed to implementing projects that empower girls and young mothers. It is named after my best childhood friend, Gufasha Moreen, who was forced into marriage at the age of 13, had to leave school as a result, and tragically died during childbirth.

The foundation’s vision is of a world in which every girl has the opportunity to achieve her fullest potential, and to participate in and contribute to all aspects of life. Our team works to achieve this by advocating for girl-child rights, including the right to education; fighting to prevent sexual violence and abuse against girls; and educating parents on good childcare practices. It’s a fight we’re determined to win.

THE CLIMATE CRISIS MEANS MORE CHILD BRIDES

I come from a community in Uganda that financially depends on agriculture for survival, but which is experiencing the brutal impacts of the climate crisis. Girls and women are disproportionately affected by climate change. To me, the climate crisis means an increase of child brides.

In my experience, most of the inequalities experienced by girls and women in my community are triggered by climate change. Floods are destroying people’s farmland, destroying infrastructures, including schools, and displacing people.

My community experiences droughts which dry up farmers’ crops leaving them financially unable to support their families and pay school fees, specifically for girls. This puts



Photo courtesy of Joan Kembabazi

girls at risk of being forced into early marriages as they’re seen as a burden, and also as a potential source of ‘bride price’ for the family.

EDUCATING GIRLS FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

The fact that girls’ education is overlooked by leaders puts more girls and women at a risk of suffering severe impacts from the climate crisis.

Research has already shown that educating girls for climate justice equips them with the right information, tools and resources they need to respond to climate related disasters.

To me, it is also a powerful strategy to end child marriage and ensure girls can fulfil their potential.

Last June, I attended the Stockholm+50 conference, which commemorated the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. My message to world leaders was to put girls at the heart of sustainability and prioritise funding girls’ education.

HELPING GIRLS FIND THEIR VOICE

Educating girls increases their opportunities in leadership and decision making for sustainable outcomes and will help them in finding their voice to hold leaders accountable and to press for commitments that build an equitable and sustainable future. Without the education of girls, a sustainable and more equal future remains beyond our reach.

HELP US BUILD A NETWORK OF PM CHOICE AMBASSADORS

Our Choice Ambassadors are young people who understand the crucial links between population, the environment and women’s and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Becoming a Population Matters Choice Ambassador means helping us raise awareness of the population issue, empowering solutions, and positive choices. Interested? Email [Florence Blondel](mailto:Florence.Blondel@enquiries@populationmatters.org) at enquiries@populationmatters.org, using the subject line ‘Choice Ambassador’. Find out more at populationmatters.org/our-choice-ambassadors.





#8BillionAndCounting

8 Billion Day

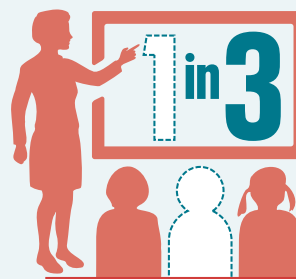
A chance to open minds and change opinions

On 15 November 2022, the **global population reached 8 billion**. This provided a unique opportunity to bring the reality of the population issue to the attention of people all over the world, writes PM's **Florence Blondel**.

THE POPULATION ISSUE has never been quite so front-and-centre in the media as it was on 15 November 2022, the day the 8 billionth living human entered the world in Manila in the Philippines. Some of the coverage of this symbolic moment was positive, some negative, but importantly there was conversation, and Population Matters contributed to much of it. We have no doubt that minds were opened and sometimes changed by the coverage we generated.

The narrative in the lead-up to the day was largely propelled by the UN and its messaging of **"8 billion hopes. 8 billion dreams. 8 billion possibilities."** The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) even celebrated the occasion across social media with the hashtag #8BillionStrong.

But did this buoyant messaging disguise the reality of what 8 billion people on the planet really means? Of course, each and



... adolescent girls (10-19) from the poorest households around the world has never been to school, according to UNICEF

every person alive should be celebrated and this milestone undoubtedly speaks to significant advancements in health, fewer early deaths and longer life expectancy. But the nature of the UN's upbeat message does not reflect reality for everyone.

LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES AND WASTED POTENTIAL

Drawing on the data, a more sobering picture is revealed. The reality beneath the positivity is one of limited opportunities and wasted potential for hundreds of millions. I fear that this hypocritical flowery language around the 8 billion people milestone is encouraging pro-natal governments to up their game in making young girls and women baby machines. Today, we are 8 billion and could be 10.4 billion by the end of the century. Not so thrilling for those who will frequently be giving birth and for the nature we will be squeezing out.

The UN's positive spin on the 8 billion milestone ignores key factors which are only exacerbated by an ever-growing global population: poverty, lack of education opportunities, child marriage, vanishing nature and the climate crisis.

The fact is, for many people on our planet, the chance to realise those 8 billion hopes, dreams and possibilities is out of reach.

Sure, the UN says we can realise the opportunities *"only if we all act responsibly and keep the interests of both people and planet in mind."* Well, guess what? We haven't, and both people and planet are already profoundly affected. The truth is, even if we did what the UN suggests, it's already too late for billions of people and many other species, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

110 million

More than 110 million girls will marry before their 18th birthday over the next decade if progress does not accelerate, according to UNICEF



Photo by Tim Mossford



Big Baby, flying high in Cardiff.

“Already, we use more of our planet’s natural resources than it can renew each year – 1.8 planet’s worth. Only possible because some of us take more than our fair share. Our ecological footprint in the UK makes us equivalent to a nation of 10-tonne King Kongs stomping about!”

Robin Maynard, PM Executive Director, speaking on 8 Billion Day

EDUCATION IN DECLINE FOR MILLIONS

For example, the current learning poverty rate (LPR) in low- and middle-income countries is alarming. Seven out of 10 children cannot read a simple text with comprehension by age 10. The latest simulations put LPR at nine out of every 10 children in Sub-Saharan Africa, 80% in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 78% in South Asia. And of course, poverty, child marriage, and missing out on school go hand in hand. According to UNICEF, one in three adolescent girls (10–19 years) from the poorest households around the world has never been to school.

So, are they part of the 8 billion innovators we obsess over? Because sadly, while we wait on “*firm political commitment and implementation of evidence-based approaches for rapid impact*” to recover and accelerate learning, millions of these children are becoming child brides and child mothers.

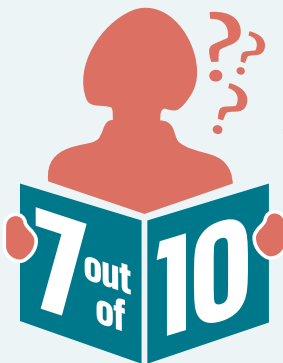
According to the World Bank, the latest data indicates that education spending in low- and lower-middle-income countries in 2022 will be below 2019 levels. There may be outliers, but what opportunities do most have? UNICEF fears that if progress does not accelerate, more than 110 million additional girls will marry before their 18th birthday over the next decade.

And yet, there are solutions available that can enact real change and, ultimately, protect the planet and our future. There is a requirement for more organisations to acknowledge the need to slow and stabilise human population growth through the advancement of ethical, positive, empowering solutions. It’s clear that if we stay on our current growth trajectory towards 10.4 billion people by the end of the century, realising the so-called 8 billion opportunities will become even more difficult than it is now.

273 GLOBAL MEDIA STORIES

PM’s message to the world

- While ‘8 billion’ was all over the TV and radio on the day, the PM team contributed to media coverage and public discussion in advance, and throughout November, generating a total of **273 global media stories**.
- Our *Crisis Point: the world at 8 billion* briefing resulted in correspondents from **France** and **Germany** seeking comment. PM Director Robin Maynard had letters featured in *The Telegraph*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Independent*.
- On the day, having spent the morning with Big Baby flying high in Cardiff speaking to passers-by, Robin then rushed to the BBC Wales studio to do national radio interviews with **Jeremy Vine on Radio 2** and with **Nihal Arthanayake on Radio 5**.
- PM also featured on **LBC Radio**, **Scotland Tonight** and Turkish global TV channel **TRT**, where Robin debated the population issue opposite **Max Lawson of Oxfam**. We also had coverage in **BBC Futures**, **Deutsche Welle**, **Yahoo**, **Japan Times**, **Hindustan Times**, **The Nation** (Kenya), plus coverage in **Croatia**, **Indonesia**, **Vietnam**, **Brazil** and **Albania**.
- In addition, PM had an opinion piece published in the *New Scientist* entitled *Tackling population growth is key to fighting climate change* and a substantial interview featured in *The Independent* – *What does a global population of 8 billion mean for the planet?*



... children in low- and middle-income countries cannot read a simple text with comprehension by age 10

Population Matters is the only charity in the UK campaigning to achieve a sustainable human population, to protect the natural world and improve people’s lives.

We promote positive, practical, ethical solutions – encouraging smaller families, inspiring people to reduce excessive consumption and helping us all to live within our planet’s natural limits.

Visit populationmatters.org/newsletter to receive campaign updates and information on how to support our work.



At the root of our environmental crisis is the simple reality that we are asking more of our planet than it can provide, and producing more waste and emissions than it can handle. Our sheer numbers are a critical driver of those unsustainable demands, but so too is how, what, and how much we consume. If we're to fix this crisis, that has to change, which is why we launched the ***We Don't Buy It*** campaign, writes PM's Alistair Currie.

IN SEPTEMBER, WE LAUNCHED our *We Don't Buy It* campaign, to challenge the unsustainable consumption that is the driving force behind our environmental crisis. Our numbers and the choices we make drive species extinctions, climate change, water shortages and so much else. In summary, our campaign seeks to:

- **CHALLENGE** the conventional wisdom that more stuff, more consumer activity and more economic growth are good for us.
- **ENCOURAGE** those of us who already have enough to consume in ways that give our planet a chance.
- **CONFRONT** the social, economic and marketing pressures that encourage us all to buy more than the planet can afford.

WHY OVERCONSUMPTION MUST BE ADDRESSED

Overconsumption on a planet with 8 billion people has huge implications for all of us. When we buy into ideas or things we don't need, we must consider what exactly we are paying for, and who else must pay the price. Whose land and resources are being taken, whose homes and livelihoods are being threatened, where does the waste we create go?

The publication of our new, fully referenced report, ***iCon: Apple, consumption and the future of the planet***, marks the next stage of our campaign, taking an in-depth look at destructive corporate activity, which pushes us to buy things we don't need, which come at a cost to the environment we don't see.

WHY APPLE? BECAUSE THEY CREATE DEMAND

Through its endless product upgrades and pervasive marketing, Apple is set on driving us to consume more and more: too much stuff is being made, marketed, bought, and disposed of. Tim Cook, Apple's CEO, has casually stated that its 'hardware ecosystem' (not just iPhones) had exceeded **1.65 billion devices** by the end of 2020. **More than 600,000**



iPhones are estimated to be produced a day – that's **400 iPhones per minute**. How does Apple keep up with demand? They create it. That's what we're seeking to change.

Supported by more than 170 references, our research uncovers how **Apple persuades customers to buy more than one million iPhones every two days**, and what the true environmental cost of production, marketing, distribution and, eventually, waste on such a scale is.

Each one of those phones comes at a cost to our planet, in energy, resources, and waste – small individually, massive collectively. But Apple's goal is to have us buy even more units: each year it gives us a new product to desire as a needless 'annual upgrade', spending hundreds of millions promoting something which is only slightly different from the thing they wanted us to buy last year.

From extraction to manufacture, distribution, and then the breakdown of waste, Apple curates a wholesome corporate giant profile with multiple reports on their sustainability practices, many of which are commendable, including aiming to be carbon neutral by 2030. They also promote programmes that focus on empowering workers, people of colour, and communities in lower-income countries.

While we applaud their efforts to reduce their ecological impact, Apple's consistent releasing and marketing of unneeded new products rolls back environmental gains and

Apple’s consistent releasing and marketing of unneeded new products rolls back environmental gains and encourages a culture of hyper-consumption far beyond our planet’s capacity to handle it.

encourages a culture of hyper-consumption far beyond our planet’s capacity to handle it. Of course, Apple isn’t the only company to do this – but it is the most iconic.

SHAREHOLDERS OR A FAIRER SHARE?

When Apple sells, and we buy, that money goes to Apple and its shareholders. Where else could it go? In July 2021, UN World Food Programme Executive Director David Beasley said it would take about \$40 billion each year to end world hunger by 2030. With Apple’s net worth of \$2.27 trillion, they could end world hunger and then feed the world for almost five decades after.

■ The UN has estimated that it would cost US\$24.6bn to end unmet contraceptive needs, gender-based violence and harmful practices, and preventable maternal deaths. That’s less than one year’s revenue for Apple.

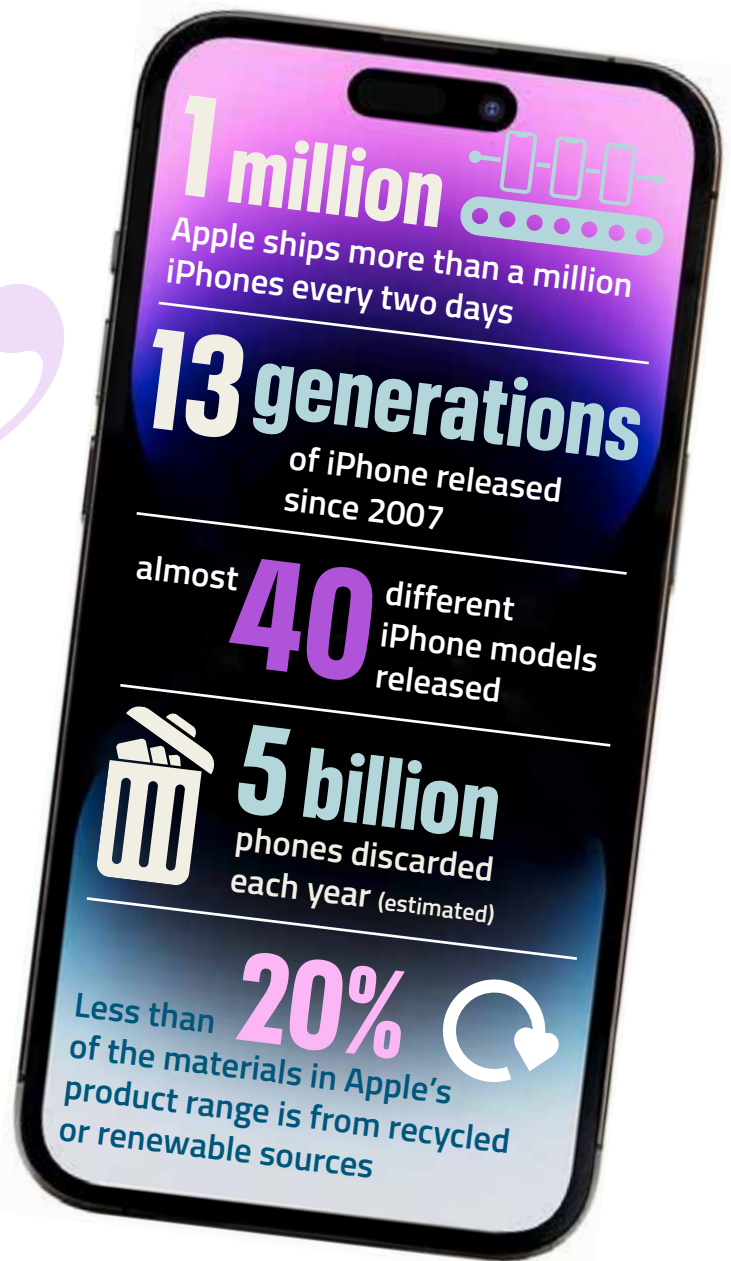
■ Apple’s estimated 2021 marketing spend was \$2.7bn. The same sum could meet the water needs for sanitation and hygiene of people in 46 least-developed countries, or protect 80% of the Brazilian Amazon for a year.

WHAT WE’RE CALLING FOR

We’re calling on Apple to abandon the marketing madness and adopt truly sustainable practices. Our report also asks questions that go far beyond one company, and challenges the ‘more growth, more profit, more consumers, more things’ lunacy that pays no regard to what is best for people and planet and is driving us to the brink of catastrophe.

We’re calling on policymakers for regulation of consumer product businesses, including introducing company law to ensure directors have legal responsibility for the wider environmental impacts of their business, and to provide clear, comprehensive and accessible guidance to consumers regarding the environmental impact of different kinds of products and services. We’re also calling on consumers to take these steps:

- Do not upgrade annually. Only replace your smartphone when it is no longer working properly.
- Use repair services wherever available.
- Explore your options. Consider sourcing new handsets from companies with high environmental standards and which don’t have an annual upgrade scheme.
- At end-of-life, ensure that your phone is properly recycled.
- Demand more accessible and simple information from manufacturers, allowing you to make informed choices regarding the environmental impact of products.
- Demand governmental policies on consumption and sustainability matching or exceeding obligations under environmental agreements such as the Global Biodiversity



Framework and UN’s Sustainability Development Goals, which are a call to action to end poverty and inequality, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy health, justice and prosperity.

- Buy less stuff.

Take action on unsustainable consumption

At Population Matters, we’re never afraid to follow the evidence, pose the tough questions, and demand change. Our new report details the impact of unsustainable consumption on the planet and what Apple – and all of us – can do about it. You can find it at populationmatters.org/resources/icon. Please share it with as many people as you can, and join our campaign by contacting Tim Cook, Apple’s CEO via populationmatters.org/email-apple-ceo-tim-cook.



ADDRESSING POPULATION

The first United Nations Water Conference for more than 40 years was held at the UN's New York HQ in March. PM was there to raise awareness of the impact of our human numbers and open up the population conversation. By Robin Maynard, Executive Director.

TWO BILLION PEOPLE still lack safe drinking water in 2023 and half of medical facilities in the Least Developed Countries worldwide lack clean water for hygiene, according to the latest Joint Monitoring Programme report by the World Health Organisation and the United Nations Children Fund.

Already 2.3 billion people live in 'water-stressed' countries, where supply cannot always meet demand, with 733 million of those living in high and critically water-stressed countries.

According to a new report by the Global Commission on the Economics of Water, by 2030, humanity will be demanding 40% more water than the Earth can supply. In terms of our natural world, over 85% of the world's wetlands have been lost in the last 300 years, the majority over the last century due to "population growth, changes to land cover and land use, and climate change".

Despite these facts, the factor of human population growth is rarely



raised in discussions on global water supply and demand. This UN Conference was no exception. The UN press statement ahead of the opening of the Conference set out the sobering challenge of accelerating progress by a factor of four to have any chance of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG6) – Clean water and sanitation for all – by 2030. No negative factor or positive solution should be ignored, surely? Yet there was no official mention of the fact that since the first UN Water Conference of 1977, our world population has nearly doubled from just over 4 billion to 8 billion.

THE POPULATION FACTOR

The task of raising and mentioning the 'population' factor fell to PM's two-person team of me, and my colleague, Florence Blondel. Over our three days in New York, we seized the limited opportunities to make the case for greater support for the readily available, ethical population solutions that help reduce water demand, curb climate change and strengthen resilience



to water stress. Solutions that are desperately wanted by hundreds of millions of women and girls globally – in particular, access to and choice over contraception – and which are cheaper and quicker acting than many other 'tech-fixes', the annual cost per woman being just \$10.

Kitty van der Heijden, the Director General for International Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands, commented that most of us are not angry enough regarding the impediments holding girls and women back. With hands firmly on the table and an impassioned voice, she said: "It will take another 300 years for women to be equitably represented. How frustrating is it for women! So many times, your rights are violated. Why is the topic difficult? Do we have the patience for another 300 years?"

Florence raised that other 'difficult' topic and impediment holding girls and women back, the relentless cycle of childbearing for many young women in developing countries: "How can you reach your potential when you are bearing and rearing children year in year out?" A key question, with 40% of women in low-income countries bearing children from the age of 19 or younger – but it went unanswered.

PROGRESS IS NOT FAST ENOUGH

In another session, *Water security, for climate resilience, food security, economic growth, global health, and gender equality*, panellists pointed out the dramatic impacts on the lives of women and girls that current crises are causing.

Lotta Tähtinen, the Chief of Outreach and Partnership Branch in the Division for Sustainable Development Goals of UN think tank DESA, which analyses and compiles a wide range of economic, social and environmental data, acknowledged that: "The world is not making progress fast enough on all SDGs, not in terms of access to water, nor are we making progress fast enough in terms of enhancing equality between

WILL HELP TURN THE TIDE



PM's Florence Blondel and Robin Maynard in New York.

WHAT NEXT FOR A WATER-STRESSED WORLD?

“Within the next few decades, 129 countries will experience an increase in drought exposure mainly due to climate change alone – 23 primarily due to population growth and 38 mostly due to the interaction between climate change and population growth.”

UN Convention to Combat Desertification, 2022ⁱ

■ In the rural areas of the poorest countries, it is girls and women predominantly, who must find and carry water. A burden totted up by UNICEF as amounting to 200 million hours annually or 8.3 million days, or more than 22,800 years.

■ 13 Least Developed Countries, which all have high population growth, are on UNCCD's list of 23 countries experiencing drought emergencies between 2020 and 2022. Those include Afghanistan (UN-projected population growth of 80% by 2050), Niger (157% growth), Madagascar (75% growth) and Ethiopia (76%).^{ii,iii}

■ More than 85% of wetlands have been lost in the last 300 years, drivers including *“population growth, changes to land cover and land use, and climate change”*.^{iv}

■ The IPCC identifies population growth as one of the two *“strongest drivers”*, alongside growth in GDP per capita, of emissions through fossil fuel consumption.^v

■ The combined effects of education and family planning in reducing population growth have been calculated to be among the top 10 currently available policy mechanisms to achieve the 1.5° target.^{vi}

PM's fully referenced briefing, *Achieving SDG6: Water and Population*, outlines the relationship between population and water, and recommends specific actions. You can find it in the RESOURCE HUB at populationmatters.org. We have also looked at the importance of connecting the issues in *Can we meet our water needs?* You can find this in the NEWS section, along with Robin's full report and videos from the 2023 UN Water Conference.

Sources: i United Nations Convention to End Desertification (2022) Drought in numbers | ii United Nations Convention to End Desertification (2022) Drought in numbers population growth figures, 2022 baseline | iii United Nations Population Division (2022) (population growth from 2022 baseline) | iv UN Stats (2022) SDGs Report 2022 | v Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2022) | vi Project Drawdown (2022).

“We were there to make the case for greater support for ethical, effective population solutions which reduce water demand, help to tackle climate change and empower people and communities.”

genders or on taking action to address the climate crisis or ensuring quality education for all.”

As you'd expect, I took the opportunity to add that in tandem with universal access to quality secondary education, it is essential to tackle the unmet need of those 270 million women for access to and choice over safe family planning. Some delegates seemed perplexed by my stating that modern contraceptives, be they

the pill, long-acting implants, or basic condoms, represented key, affordable technological-fixes – just as effective if not more so, than high-cost, shiny pipelines, desalination plants, and other engineered infrastructure. But more applauded our interventions and thanked us for raising the underlying, upstream (literally), and undermentioned issue of human population growth, its impacts and solutions.

A job or a child?

Population Matters is committed to population solutions which are consistent with human rights and freedom of choice. We were disturbed to learn of proposals in India to limit family sizes and commissioned Indian gender and reproductive rights campaigner **Debanjana Choudhury** to investigate further...

CONSIDERED TO BE ONE of the darkest chapters in Indian history, the National Emergency of 1975–77 is remembered as the era of forced sterilisations. It has been estimated that in 1976 alone, around 6.2 million men were sterilised, and more than 2,000 men died in botched operations.

While India has seen progressive, empowering and very effective population policies, such as in the state of Kerala, the legacy of coercive approaches has been long.

Overtly coercive official policies were ended by the 1980s, and by the 2000s, the National Planning Policy identified meeting the unmet need for family planning as its immediate objective and stabilising the population as its long-term goal. Today, while India has recently overtaken China as the world's most populous country, its fertility rate is well below the global average, and a peak and then decline in population is in sight. Despite this, in a number of Indian states, the harsh coercion policies of the past have subtly mutated.

YOUR OPTIONS WILL BE LIMITED

India's federal system allows states to adopt their own legislation and policies on population. In practice, in some states, you can have as many children as you like, but the authorities will limit your options and civil rights if you have more than two.

For example, a person with more than two children shall be disqualified from contesting an election in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, and ineligible for

appointment in any posts under the state government in Assam. In Gujarat (Prime Minister Modi's home state) anyone with more than two children is disqualified from contesting elections for bodies of local self-governance. Women with more than two children are also not allowed to benefit from the Public Distribution System in Maharashtra.

In Odisha, those with more than two children are barred from holding any post in panchayats (village councils) and urban local bodies. In Rajasthan, such candidates are disqualified from contesting election as a village

Governments concerned about population must take positive steps that respect rights and improve people's lives.

head or a member. In Uttarakhand, an amendment to the law passed as recently as 2019, bars individuals with more than two children from contesting panchayat elections.

These policies are not simply legacies of a less enlightened time. Uttar Pradesh, for example, has seen a run of recent proposals for punitive two-child policies.

The Population (Control, Stabilisation and Welfare) Bill introduced in 2021 proposed incentivising a two-child family size with housing subsidies, soft loans for constructing or purchasing a house, tax rebates, increased pensions, and free health care facilities.

For those who did not comply, however, it proposed they should be barred from accessing other government-sponsored welfare schemes, contesting local elections, applying to government jobs, and, most shockingly, have limited access to food rations.



Photo by Devanshi Bose on Unsplash

While the Uttar Pradesh bills are the only ones laid before legislatures, they have sparked conversations in other states such as Karnataka and Uttarakhand about introducing similar measures.

Such policies also have an underlying social or religious agenda in many cases, with false claims about rising numbers of Muslims as a result of their supposedly larger families being exploited by Hindu nationalist politicians, seeking to achieve, as they call it, a “*religion-based population balance*”.

THE RIGHT TO MAKE A CHOICE

These policies undermine reproductive freedom of choice, exacerbate gender inequality, and, in a country with considerable socio-cultural barriers to abortion and misconceptions about its legality, will increase the number of forced sterilisations and unsafe abortions.

The freedom to have a family, and to decide the size of your family, is established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A no less fundamental right is to be able to make that choice, through having the services needed to exercise it, including contraception, abortion and comprehensive sexuality education.

Exercising that choice, especially for the most vulnerable in society, must also mean freedom from punishment and disadvantage from those in power.

Governments concerned about population must take the positive steps that respect rights and improve people's lives, and that are shown to work: ensuring everyone can access family planning services, alleviating poverty, providing the highest standards of child and maternal health, ensuring everyone is able to go through school, and establishing true gender equality. The two-child policies in Indian states must be ended.

■ To read the report in full, search for ‘India's coercive population policies’ in the NEWS section at [populationmatters.org](https://www.populationmatters.org).



YOUNG VOICES ARE ESSENTIAL TO IMPROVING EVERYONE'S FUTURE

PM's **Izi Clery** reports on an initiative in Albania that's part of the global campaign for the inclusion of marginalised young people in the 2030 sustainable development agenda.

INITIALLY SET UP within the regional 'Youth Voice' campaign with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF), our latest Empower to Plan partner, **Albania's Youth Voice Network of Organisations (YVNO)** focuses on improving young people's wellbeing and dignity through inclusive sex education workshops, including reaching out to groups who traditionally have the least access to these services.

As part of the global campaign for the inclusion of young people in the 2030 sustainable development agenda, YVNO is working towards all-inclusive education, human rights and gender equality, and the empowerment and participation of young people to play a part in their own futures. This includes marginalised groups like Roma, where according to the European Roma Rights Centre, more than 60% of Romani women and girls in Albania didn't finish primary school. There are also high rates of malnutrition in Romani families and many Roma communities lack access to basic infrastructure such as clean water, sanitation and electricity.

WORKSHOPS AND PODCASTS

With Empower to Plan support, one of the Network's members, **Act for Society**, will be working alongside Roma peer educators and community leaders to deliver a bespoke series of accessible workshops about sexual and reproductive and menstrual health at community centres in and around Tirana, the Albanian capital, alongside a podcast by young people, for young people about gender quality and the environment.

Working in conjunction with the Tirana municipality, YVNO will also produce a study on menstrual health, sanitation and access to clean water. The resulting report will, they hope, lead to societal changes, with improved



infrastructure for Albania's most marginalised communities.

Chosen as UNPF's implementing partner in the Balkans, YVNO is leading change across Albania. As the group's director, Andi Rabiaj, reflects: *"I have witnessed and seen first-hand early marriages and many other harmful practices targeting girls. I felt this inner moral imperative to raise my voice and contribute to a society where, as a rule, it is not usual for men and boys to commit to seeking gender equality and gender justice."*



It is imperative that boys and men are part of the solution to achieve gender equality and justice too. Whether that's using dance and music to discuss comprehensive sex education and reproductive rights, or creating informal spaces for youth to gather and share ideas on pregnancy, contraception and safe sex, Andi is full of practical ideas to empower the next generation.

Best of all, Andi and the Network recognise that the health of people and planet are intrinsically linked. Last

year, Tirana was the European Youth Capital, the impetus for youth groups to come together and develop a 'Call to Action' on gender-responsive solutions to climate change, in response to two of the greatest challenges of our time. We are delighted to be able to support some of the Network's activities through Empower to Plan.

EMPOWER TO PLAN

■ A vital first step to reduce population growth is to enable hundreds of millions of girls and women worldwide to have access to quality education and to meet their need for safe, modern family planning – so they can choose when or if to have children and enjoy full bodily autonomy.

■ Population Matters' pioneering initiative Empower to Plan 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.

■ Supporting local groups which deliver vital on-the-ground family planning and sexual and reproductive health and education services by backing projects such as **Turimiquire in Venezuela** and **The Awakening in Pakistan** (see page 19), will increase their impact in the communities that need the most help.

■ Find out more at populationmatters.org/empower-to-plan.

Signed, sealed, delivered?

One million species are currently at risk of extinction. So, asks PM's **Alistair Currie**, does the new **Global Biodiversity Framework** have what it takes to end the crisis?

IN AN UNSUCCESSFUL bid to save the natural world, in 2011 more than 190 countries agreed a set of 20 targets for 2020 intended to protect nature and reverse the extinctions and loss of biodiversity that had increased dramatically over the 20th century.

Not one of the 20 targets was hit. Now, delayed by Covid and a failure to reach agreement, the so-called post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was finally signed at the end of last year.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT THE NEW FRAMEWORK?

The GBF consists of four overarching goals and a set of 23 targets, intended to address the key drivers of biodiversity loss and establish the principles and approaches for action. Its ultimate goal is for humans to live “*in harmony with nature*” by 2050 and it is ambitious and clear in its goal on extinctions: “*Human induced extinction of known threatened species is halted, and, by 2050, extinction rate and risk of all species are reduced tenfold.*”

However, while these ambitious goals have been cautiously lauded, there is a distinct lack of clarity on processes and, critically, uncertainty that governments will take the action required. As with the Paris Agreement on climate change, adoption of the framework is only the start of a process. The mechanisms by which its targets will be achieved are largely still to be determined – and securing agreement on these will be crucial. It will also be down to individual governments to implement the GBF and establish national policies in their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans. If those plans aren't robust, the whole thing fails.

\$6 TRILLION OF SUBSIDIES THAT HARM NATURE

Widely recognised as driving biodiversity loss are incentives by government, such as to agricultural

businesses or extractive industries, that actually encourage them to take actions which harm nature – so called ‘perverse subsidies’. In a 2021 report commissioned by the UK Government and produced by Population Matters patron Sir Partha Dasgupta, such incentives were estimated to run to more than \$6 trillion annually across the world. The GBF seeks to reduce those subsidies by \$500bn per year by 2030 – but hasn't yet established how that will be done.

It is difficult to see how this, or any biodiversity framework, can achieve its goals when it fails to take meaningful action on the two biggest underlying drivers of biodiversity loss – consumption and population.

How the measures the agreement calls for would be paid for was another critical negotiation point. With some of the most biodiverse and threatened ecosystems found in low-income countries, agreement was secured in principle for wealthier countries to provide more financial support for action, aiming for a total budget of \$200bn per year by 2030. The GBF is not legally binding, however, and mechanisms and binding commitments for the transfer of money are still being negotiated. If – and it's a very big if – governments should truly commit to the



Photo by Rosanna Gaddoni on Unsplash

actions and targets set out in the GBF, it will undoubtedly be more successful than the process which preceded it. However, it is difficult to see how this, or any biodiversity framework, can achieve its goals when it fails to take meaningful action on the two biggest underlying drivers of biodiversity loss – consumption and population.

On consumption, targets weakly seek actions by policymakers and companies which “*encourage and enable*” change by individuals, rather than confronting the forces which drive unsustainable demand. During the negotiation process, Population Matters submitted evidence and lobbied governments and participating organisations to promote the importance of action to address population. Our supporters also sent thousands of emails to their own governments. Sadly, these were not enough to have population mentioned in the main text at all. However, as the negotiation and implementation phase begins, we will be seeking further opportunities to influence governments.

HELP NATURE FIGHT BACK



Nature is under pressure from

humans as never before. It's time for us all to take action – locally, nationally and globally, to slow human population growth and help protect our precious planet and the species we share it with. Find out more at populationmatters.org/humanature.

Q&A with **Erfaan Hussein Babak**

Erfaan Hussein Babak is a human rights activist and founder and director of Pakistani organisation, **The Awakening**. An Empower to Plan partner, The Awakening is focused on empowering girls and boys to create a future free of violence and discrimination.



Photos courtesy of The Awakening

Q: When was The Awakening first established?

A: It was set up in 2011 to empower vulnerable and disenfranchised women in rural areas of Pakistan. We achieve this through a variety of programmes that engage girls, boys, community elders and religious leaders throughout the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. The Awakening firmly believes that engaging men and boys in family planning and sexual and reproductive health improves their own lives, as well as the lives of their intimate partners, families and communities, and reduces rates of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, improving maternal health and advancing gender equality.

Q: What are the key challenges – and how are you overcoming them?

A: Gender-based violence, harmful practices and unsafe abortions are often the norm rather than the exception in northern Pakistan. Working on human rights in this strict patriarchal Pashtun society is a constant challenge, but, after our training sessions with the Council of Islamic Ideology, we have seen successes. Moderate religious leaders educate the less moderate ones on the fact that matters relating to women's bodies are health and medical issues, not religious issues.

Q: What's the main focus of The Awakening?

A: We're committed to shifting harmful attitudes and behaviours.

This includes encouraging men and boys to become champions of gender equality, supporting women's safety and dignity and calling out gender-based violence. Like Malala Yousafzai, who grew up in the communities served by The Awakening, the team is spreading awareness about the importance of girls' education. The Malala Fund estimates that by 2025, climate change will be a contributing factor in preventing at least 12.5 million girls around the world from completing their education each year. Yet if we were to achieve universal secondary education for all girls everywhere, we could safeguard the happiness and wellbeing of girls, ensure their rights are met and eliminate child marriage and early childbearing.

Q: What are your hopes for the future?

A: We are grateful to Population Matters as the support from Empower to Plan will enable our team to reach and support hundreds of people through a series of community projects. As the global challenges we are facing worsen, we need locally led community action to reach the world's most vulnerable and marginalised girls and their communities. Our goal is for The Awakening to continue to lead the way in northern Pakistan, ensuring that Comprehensive Sexuality Education and reproductive healthcare are accessible and available to those who need it most.

■ For more about our partners, visit populationmatters.org/empower-to-plan.



Tackling taboos and busting myths in Pakistan

In the northern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan, 70% of girls get married before they turn 18 and the average family size is six to seven children. Daily life is continually disrupted by floods and extreme weather events – the unprecedented monsoon rains of 2022 left a third of the country underwater.

The Awakening, based in the northern Swat Valley, is now part of Forum-Asia's Human Rights Defenders Programme. Erfaan and his five-person team are building feminist leadership, advancing women's human rights and advocating for gender and social justice. Their aim is to tackle the taboo around family planning and demystify the myths and stigmas around abortion and women's bodily autonomy.

Thanks to your support through Empower to Plan, The Awakening will reach and support hundreds of people through a series of projects, including:

- Engaging 200 girls and boys through weekly Girls' and Boys' Groups.
- Engaging 50 community elders and religious leaders as part of a Men's Support Group.
- Organising 10 medical camps with information about and access to contraceptive provision and abortion care.
- Establishing a 24/7 safe abortion care hotline called 'Saheli' (female friend).
- Empowering 30 girls as agents of change who will lead a series of sexual and reproductive health and education training workshops to 1,500 school students.
- Organising 6 training days for the girl agents of change to learn about communication, lobbying and advocacy skills on issues of human rights and gender-based violence.



LESS



IS

MORE

Fewer of us means more space for nature

DISCOVER MORE AT [POPULATIONMATTERS.ORG](https://www.populationmatters.org)

Population Matters campaigns to achieve a sustainable human population, to protect the natural world and improve people's lives. We are committed to human rights, women's empowerment and global justice.



TM

Every choice counts