

The Chandlery
50 Westminster Bridge Road
London
SE1 7QY

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
King Charles St
London
SW1A 2AH

18th April 2024

To Lord Cameron,

Population Matters is a charity, which campaigns to achieve a sustainable human population, to protect the natural world and improve people's lives. We have an active campaign focused on addressing human population growth as an indirect driver of biodiversity loss, a claim we support with rigorous scientific evidence.

In May 2019, the Intergovernmental Science Policy platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) in its global assessment, explicitly noted that human population growth is an indirect driver of increasing biodiversity loss, stating that *"changes to the direct drivers of nature deterioration cannot be achieved without transformative change that simultaneously addresses the indirect drivers."*

The UN's 2023 Interconnected Disaster Risks report examining accelerating wildlife extinctions identified that *"Since the 1950s, the world has seen an acceleration in human population growth and resultant demands for water, energy, food and land, with severe consequences for the Earth system."*

With the UK a prominent party to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, we commend the government for all it is doing to support implementation of the treaty, including the allocation of £10 million last year to the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund focused on nature recovery. However, if the UK is to succeed in achieving the main aim of the Global Biodiversity Framework to half and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, then we must tackle the indirect drivers of the biodiversity crisis, including measures to slow and end human population growth in at-risk conservation areas.

It's an identified pattern that the areas richest in biodiversity are bordered by low-income communities, whose subsistence-based lifestyles put intense pressure on natural resources. On the ground level, they clear surrounding forest for fuel and set up smallholdings, with poor agricultural practice leading to soil erosion and desertification. The healthcare sector refers to these areas as "last-mile" communities, as they typically lack access to safe, modern contraception, resulting in rapid local population growth. The exponential growth of population means the expansion of smallholdings over a couple generations driving deforestation. In addition, a large local population places unsustainable demand on natural resources, which inevitably leads to overhunting and overfishing practices resulting in the collapse of local ecosystems, accelerating biodiversity loss.

The areas critical to preserve biodiversity, overlap with communities most in need of sexual and reproductive healthcare (SRHR), hence the pressing need to fund a multisectoral Population Health Environment (PHE) approach.

PHE projects provide voluntary family planning information and services, education on sustainable natural resource management, and environmental conservation in a coordinated manner. Evidence shows that PHE projects have more effective results than single sector approaches. The World Wildlife Fund reported in multiple projects that integrating family planning and health services into their work improved local support for their conservation efforts. PHE projects also increase male support for and involvement in family planning. A case study by PHE Ethiopia found that 30% of men in PHE sites supported the use of contraception, compared to 7% of men in reproductive health-only sites.

In supporting implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework, IUCN published their Global Species Action Plan to guide policymakers' conservation strategies. Under subsection 14.5 there is a specific action directed at governments & NGOs: *Ensure removal of barriers to rights-based voluntary family planning*. A clear call for family planning programs to be incorporated into biodiversity conservation strategies. The US International Development department has been an active supporter of PHE projects for decades and we urge the government to commit to do the same.

The government funding PHE projects would follow a proud precedent of the UK as an internationally recognised advocate known for supporting SRHR and family planning programs globally, through its diplomatic support and aid programming. The UK a long-time supporter of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). We were pleased to see that the white paper, International development in a contested world, stated "*Investment in voluntary family planning must always prioritise women's empowerment and be rooted in human rights*" recognising the importance of choice-based family planning as a keystone for sustainable development.

We appreciate all that the government has done and is currently doing to fund SRHR services across international territories. However, we are also aware of systemic cuts to SRHR funding in recent years, which has had a detrimental impact on SRHR work in priority areas, forcing bodies such as UNFPA to scale back. According to the International Development Committee report on this issue, the government has reduced its spending on sexual and reproductive health by a third, halved its spending on family planning, and cut spending on reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health by 37% since 2019. The scale of the current shortfall in SRHR funding cannot be downplayed as it underlies the crisis of more than 200 million women with an unmet need for safe, modern contraceptives.

An effective strategy to resolve the current shortfall in SRHR funding and for the UK to be a leader in achieving the aim of the Global Biodiversity Framework to half and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 through addressing the indirect drivers caused by human population growth, is to fund PHE projects.

Population Matters urges the government to announce commitments to promote and fund PHE projects as part of its defined solutions to reverse biodiversity loss.

We would appreciate it if you could inform us on whether the government plans to secure funding for PHE projects under its commitments to the Global Biodiversity Framework and international development aid.

Yours sincerely,
Madeleine Hewitt
Campaigns and Media Officer - Population Matters