

# Population Growth and Climate Change

## A Text for COP 17

### 1. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century 'Perfect Storm'

In a recent speech, the UK Government Chief Scientist described the approaching 'perfect storm', comprising population growth, climate change and peak oil, leading to global food, water and energy insecurity. Population growth (currently some 80 million per year, or 10,000 per hour, all needing more energy and producing more CO<sub>2</sub>), and growing resource consumption per person, are the common multipliers of all these problems.

### 2. Reducing Carbon Emissions: 'Running to stand still'

At any scale, *total emissions equal average emissions per person, multiplied by the number of people*. Every additional person makes it harder to reduce total emissions and harder to provide adaptation measures for all. If human numbers keep rising, the UNFCCC (and all other environmental initiatives) are simply 'running to stand still', and will ultimately fail.

### 3. Population: the 'Elephant in the UNFCCC Room'

Governments have hitherto chosen to ignore this 'inconvenient truth', preferring to pretend that global climatic (and wider environmental) sustainability is achievable, regardless of how many carbon (and other resource) consumers there are. But it is not true; and sooner or later, the issue of population growth must be addressed. **Population growth IS a climate change issue.**

### 4. The UK: an Indicative Illustration

For instance, the UK population is currently projected to increase by some 10 million in the next 22 years. A study by an LSE post-graduate student last year concluded that this would add over one billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> to UK emissions, or need renewables equivalent to 27,000 more wind turbines **just to stand still** in total emissions. Each Briton has the carbon footprint of 22 Malawians.

### 5. Recommendation: Table a text at COP 17

The following is a draft text for inclusion in the LCA outcomes at Durban: ***Recognises that population growth: increases total carbon emissions, especially in developed countries; increases the number of victims requiring adaptation measures, especially women in developing countries; inhibits economic development, notably in the least developed countries; thus worsens all problems of both mitigation and adaptation; and can be countered cost-effectively by meeting the unmet need for reproductive health care; by women's empowerment, gender-equality, and the right to family planning; and by non-coercive population stabilisation policies in all countries.***

Population Matters on behalf of the **European Population Alliance**: One Baby (Belgium); Demographie Responsable (France); Herbert Gruhl Society (Germany); BOCS (Hungary); Associazione Radicale Rientrodolce (Italy); Population Matters – Sweden; ECOPOP (Switzerland)

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## **ANNEX Additional Benefits of Complementary Family Planning Approach**

PM's 2009 report "**Fewer Emitters, Lower Emissions, Less Cost**", and the CGD report 2010, both concluded that investing in family planning could be more cost-effective than the conventional approach in terms of \$ per carbon tonne saved. It also recognises that carbon emissions per person are far greater in OECD countries than in poorer countries; and recommends improved family planning in all countries. Directing more external resources to the improvement of family planning services in the poorer countries, could also achieve a large number of significant indirect benefits. These include:

- a) Taking a major step towards stabilising human numbers at, and/or reducing them to, a level planet Earth can sustain in the long-term;
- b) Fully mitigating the carbon and other environmental impacts not only of the additional people whose unwanted conception or birth will be prevented, but of all their non-existent descendants in perpetuity;
- c) Doing so with very little, one-off embodied energy, compared with the major embodied energy in building, maintaining and replacing renewable energy technologies in perpetuity;
- d) Reducing the number of future victims of climate change, and the costs of adaptation for them;
- e) Empowering the poor women of the world to take control of their own fertility, as a necessary pre-condition for any wider empowerment;
- f) Alleviating poverty and increasing development through improvements in health, nutrition and education for women and children;
- g) Reducing the scale of all environmental problems, including: the effects of peak oil; deforestation; freshwater shortages; soil erosion and desertification; the mounting food crisis; declining fisheries; loss of biodiversity; rising waste and pollution; ocean acidification; and depletion of all finite resources - all of which would be easier to solve with fewer people, and ultimately impossible to solve with ever more; (*The fewer we are, the lower our impact*).
- h) Reducing the pressures contributing to: growing conflicts over land and ever more scarce resources; mass migration; under- or unemployment; urban stress; crime; and mental health problems; (*The more we are, the less for each*).
- i) Freeing more capital from investment in renewable energy generation to invest in: energy conservation technology; marine and other research; flood defences; climate resilient agriculture; sustainable water resources; social adaptation to lower energy consumption in OECD countries; and all other adaptation programmes.
- j) Encouraging OECD countries, with their far higher per capita emissions, to introduce non-coercive population restraint policies too, as an additional cost-effective way of abating their own carbon tonnage in their own long-term interests.

**In any case, on a finite planet human numbers must stop growing at some point, either earlier through fewer births (contraception backed by non-coercive policy), or later by more deaths (the natural controls of famine, disease, and predation/war). Indefinite growth is not an option.**