

Quaker Concern Over Population

DIFFICULT QUESTIONS ABOUT POPULATION

A QCOP Handbook

Written by Roger Plenty and QCOP members

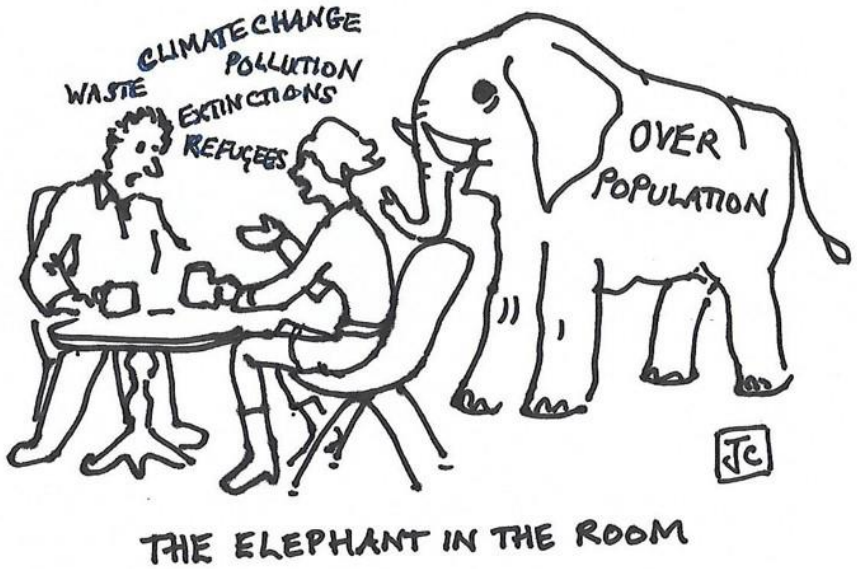
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Cartoon by Jeanette Cayley, Charlbury Meeting

Why should Quakers bother about this? How is it part of the sustainability debate?

Quakers work for a sustainable planet, for a simple life-style, for peace in the world, and for equality. Our world can scarcely produce enough resources to provide water, food, fuel and living space for the current global population, so a continually-growing population strains the planet's capacity to sustain the human race, as well as crowding out other species.

QCOP is a British Quaker group; however the health of our shared planet is a concern for people all over the world and we can all bring and share our varied experiences and perspectives. QCOP wants to hear and learn from Quakers in Africa, in India, in Latin America – in fact from everywhere! What stories can we tell each other? How can we help each other to understand the question of overpopulation and to change the way we live?

We are called to live simply, that others may simply live. In this simplicity, we can decide "One or two children is enough" or "I am content not to have children" and give up the urge to reproduce ourselves.

Beth Allen, Bromley Meeting

Choice, education and empowerment are at the very heart of our message.

“All environmental problems become harder - and ultimately impossible to solve - with ever more people”.

David Attenborough

All of these questions or comments are genuine ones that are frequently asked.

1. “I’m not going to be told by you how many children I should have.”

We’re not telling you how many children to have. We’re giving you and everyone else that listens information that you might take into account when choosing the size of your family. We realise not everyone will act on this, but some certainly will.



Cartoon by permission of Jeff Parker

The population of the Earth is 7.8 billion. (October 2020) At present the population grows by a billion every 12 years.

The Earth can sustain 2 billion living at present developed world rates of consumption.

2. “Surely Nature can be trusted to solve the problem? Nature has endured many challenges in the past. Will it not do so again?”

Nature will certainly adjust, but her methods are brutal. Any biologist will tell you that a population explosion of any species is followed by a catastrophic collapse. Humans are part of nature and subject to its laws: they are no different from other species.

Sir David Attenborough, in his opening address to the 2018 UN climate change conference in Poland stated that we are now in serious danger of the collapse of world civilization. If he’s right, this would bring about unimaginable horrors, resulting in a drastic reduction of human numbers.

Practically no large wild animals will survive a world in the grip of total famine, and the consequence would be a world very impoverished biologically, and containing very few humans. Those who survived would be likely to be living in savagery.

Any suggestion that our technology will save us begs the question, who are “us”?

WEIGHT OF ALL VERTEBRATE LAND ANIMALS ON EARTH



10,000 YEARS AGO



 **1% humans**

TODAY

 **1% wild animals**



 **32% humans**

populationmatters.org
Calculations based on Smil (2011)

Graphic courtesy of Population Matters

3. “I’ve heard it said that you could get the whole of the world’s population into Texas, with plenty of room.”

Yes, there is room to put all the world’s people in Texas, where they would each have an area about ten metres square. That might just feed one if it was fertile and had an adequate water supply, but you would presumably want to build a house on it; also you would like a road to gain access to it: you’d want reservoirs to supply water to it, you’d like schools to educate your children, you’d want shops, surgeries, hospitals, sports facilities, places of work, factories, workshops, offices. Your allocated piece of land would get smaller and smaller. To say you could get everyone into Texas is like saying you could get everyone in your street into your house and garden: possibly you could, but it wouldn’t be comfortable

At present, there are about two useful acres of land per person, but, of course, this diminishes as population increases. The average American uses about 24 acres, including all the facilities listed above.



©Seppo

Human thinking.

We live in economic mindsets where success is shown by increasing our consumption, with bigger houses, more cars and roads and irresponsible eating habits. Let's aim for a lower, more modest population so that ALL species can enjoy enough resources to live.

4. “Isn’t it a question of consumption rather than population?”

It is more a matter of consumption and population. The idea that it is ‘either/or’ is a way to avoid discussion of population, and is an artificial division. To reduce it to an absurdity, if there were no people, there would be no consumption.

Excessive consumption must certainly stop. As Mahatma Gandhi said: “The world has enough for everyone’s need, but not enough for everyone’s greed!” Yet as all the data we quote here shows, the first part of the saying is very probably no longer true, the world now has altogether too many ‘everyone’s’ even if they are all not “greedy”. So, in answer to this question, both must be addressed.

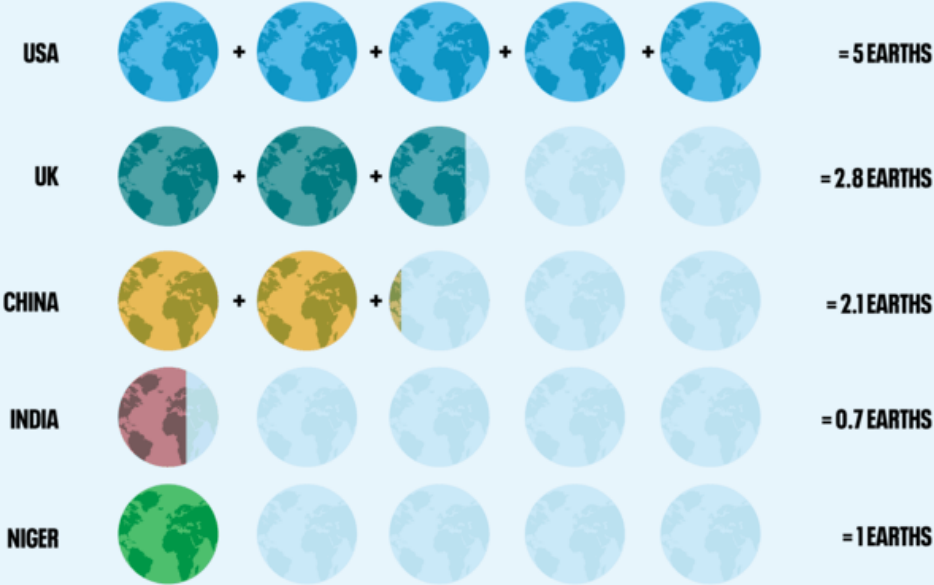
To see this subject in images, we recommend the book, ‘Overdevelopment, Overpopulation, Overshoot’ can be viewed page by page online at:

<https://populationspeakout.org/the-book/view-book/>

See Page 41 for further comment on Quakers and living sustainably, plus a graphic on the Top five solutions to climate change.

Number of Earths needed if everyone used renewable resources at the same rate as these individual countries.

CONSUMPTION OF EARTH'S RESOURCES:



Number of Earths needed if everyone used renewable resources at the same rate as these individual countries.

populationmatters.org
Source: Global Footprint Network, 2018

5. “High birth rates are a consequence, in other words a symptom, of poverty, and you can’t cure a problem by treating a symptom. The most effective way to reduce birth rates is to address the fundamental causes by lifting social-economic conditions.”

This is one of those ‘either/or’ arguments similar to Question 4. Of course reducing poverty will tend to reduce fertility, but reducing fertility tends to reduce poverty. There is a cycle here: poverty increases fertility increases poverty increases fertility... Why should we address this point at one place in the cycle only? If you get people out of poverty, they will need contraception at that point to reduce fertility: **the reduction of fertility doesn’t happen by itself**. The cycle needs addressing at all points: reducing fertility of the poorest does indeed improve their circumstances.

What exactly do the words mean?

For a useful glossary of terms such as fertility, birth-rates, net reproduction rate, growth rate, Malthus, Neo-Malthusian etc. go to Population Reference Bureau (PRB) on prb.org/glossary/

Case study of Kerala - Population around 34 million

The Indian state of Kerala is a good example. Women, empowered through better education plus improved health and family planning facilities, have chosen to have fewer children. The result has been a massive reduction in population growth and poverty. The state went from having one of the highest Indian population growth rates in 1950's to the lowest in the 1990's. "The population growth trend shows that Kerala is moving towards zero population growth or even negative population [growth]." ¹ It is also the most literate state in India.

Soap operas and Brazil - Population 211 million and still rising.

Responding to requests from around the world, the American NGO, Population Media Center (PMC) works with local writers and actors to devise and produce radio and television soap-opera style dramas in the local language. These weave into the storyline information about smaller families and how to achieve them. "Women viewing these programs (in Brazil 2013) sought to emulate them and, combined with greater access to contraception, this led to a declining fertility rate and an increase in women's independence and ability to pursue educational and career opportunities." ²

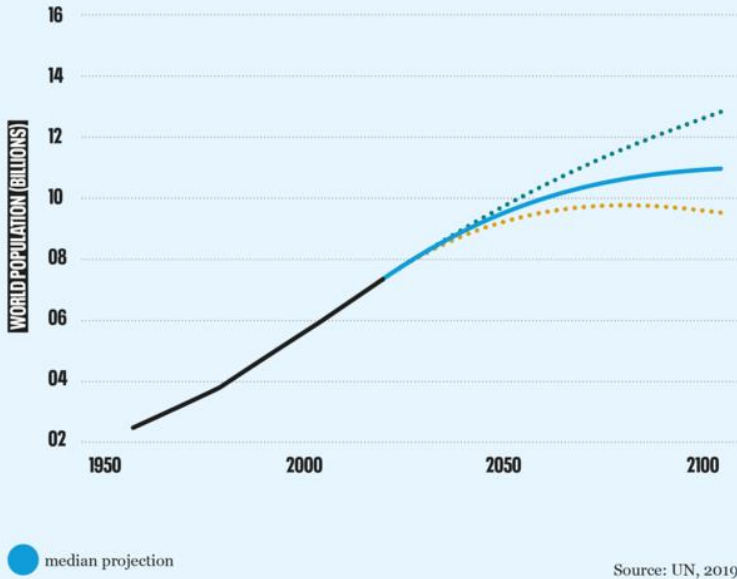
6. “I understand that there isn’t a problem with overpopulation anymore.”

We have known for a long time that fertility is falling. However, several trends continue to be all too true:

- The global population is still growing by a billion every twelve years, the fastest it has ever grown.
- About 40% of all pregnancies are unintentional.
- The great number of terminations, safe and unsafe, argues that there is a huge unfulfilled demand for contraception.
- 217 million women of reproductive age are not using modern contraceptives.
- Contraception is opposed by a number of powerful bodies, including religious bodies and governments ruled by a populist agenda.

For the planet to become and remain sustainable, the population issue will need to pass into our collective deepest personal consciousness, for good. Here is where everyone can contribute to changing our cultural understanding, by making it easier to discuss the value of smaller families.

UNITED NATIONS POPULATION PROJECTIONS TO 2100: 95% CERTAINTY RANGE



Courtesy of Population Matters

*“The UN’s... latest median projection is a population of **9.7bn** in 2050 and **10.9bn** in 2100... Within its 95% certainty range, the difference in population in 2100 from the highest to lowest projection is almost 4bn people - more than half the population we have today.”*

Population Matters

7. “Hans Rosling says there isn’t a population problem. Do you think you know more than he does?”

Hans Rosling was not a demographer: he was a statistician, and while very talented in that field, he did not have a good grasp of population issues. An article about him states that he “did not believe that current or future levels of population and consumption...would do unacceptable damage to the planet or to civil society... (His) views were well accepted by neo-liberals, technological enthusiasts and some opponents of birth-control, (but) they alarmed many environmentalists”.³

My own opinion (Roger Plenty) of Rosling is formed by the fact that in his well-known television programme he mentioned the sharp decline of fertility in Bangladesh in such a way as to suggest that this was a natural process, and that therefore we need not worry about population growth. The decline there, however, was the result of the Bangladeshi government applying precisely the kind of policies advocated by population activists, involving a very positive programme of health care clinics and the provision of contraception. In this, therefore, Rosling was disingenuous.⁴

More on Bangladesh on page 25

Join Population Matters for up to date, fact based information and resources. www.populationmatters.org

Formerly known as the Optimum Population Trust, Population Matters is a UK-based charity that addresses population size and its effects on environmental sustainability. It considers population growth as a major contributor to climate change, environmental degradation, and resource depletion.

See also Population Media Center (PMC)

www.populationmedia.org/

PMC builds a sustainable planet with equal rights for all by creating hit entertainment (such as radio soap operas) that changes lives. They work on critical issues like reproductive health, girls' education, and environmental sustainability. PMC has impacted more than 500 million people in more than 50 countries around the world. (See p.15 for more on PMC.)

Join QCOP and get briefings from around the world.

www.qcop.org.uk

8. “Is concern about over-population racist?”

Regrettably, racism is prevalent in society. However, it has no part in any argument for restricting human population growth.

No-one who cares about sustainability has any intention other than to make the world a better place for every race. It has been shown that human ethnic groups have a greater genetic diversity within them than there is between them.⁵ Superficial characteristics such as skin colour are very misleading.

We will all suffer if human population continues to grow unrestrained.

Jeanette Cayley, Charlbury Meeting.

Blog by Florence Blondel⁶, a Ugandan journalist living in the UK and USA and writing in Population Voice.



“If we don’t have the conversation about our growing numbers, we will be doing an injustice not only to nature but to the women who are mostly expected to ‘reproduce and fill the earth’.

“Most people fighting against the discussion, especially people living in countries with high-income, make excuses like, that’s racist, eugenics etc. I find the racist point an annoyance. What’s racist about it? Have you been to our countries? Have you been to the rural areas which make up most of the countries? Have you smelt the

stinking poverty and hunger? Noticed children hanging around their mothers hungry? Found a household with about 5 children under 5 years and another in the womb – with oldest girls married off at 13? ...

“If you live in a high-income country, shame on you because you should know where you were in the 18th century before the demographic transition. That’s where some African countries are stuck, predominantly rural, having up to 7 children or more, lower expectation of life, no formal education, you name it!

“If this writing comes off as a rant, you are right. It is a rant. Because it is a crucial topic I am passionate about. Why would you be against anyone honestly talking about population when its growth mostly oppresses young girls and women?...

“Why can’t we get the benefits of the enlightenment like you did? Childbearing was among the factors that held many women back until they got access to those benefits. We also want to have a moment of progress and not always be among countries with high fertility rates which are genuine holdbacks...

“Please start talking about population growth and its effects on the environment and on young girls and women. Much more could be done to ensure that all women have access to modern contraceptives and have the decisional autonomy over how many children they have.”

This blog was written for Population Voices. The full text of this blog is on the QCOP website: www.qcop.org.uk

9. “Isn’t it racist to stop immigrants coming into the UK?”

Let’s consider this from a global perspective, not just a national one. Animals, birds, humans and even plants move to better places to live and flourish: migration’s basic function is to enhance species resilience and diversity. Human migration is already increasing and is going to be a much bigger problem soon.

Take, for example, the Sahel, the semi-arid strip of land that spans Africa to the south of the Sahara Desert. This had a population of around 100 million in 2019.

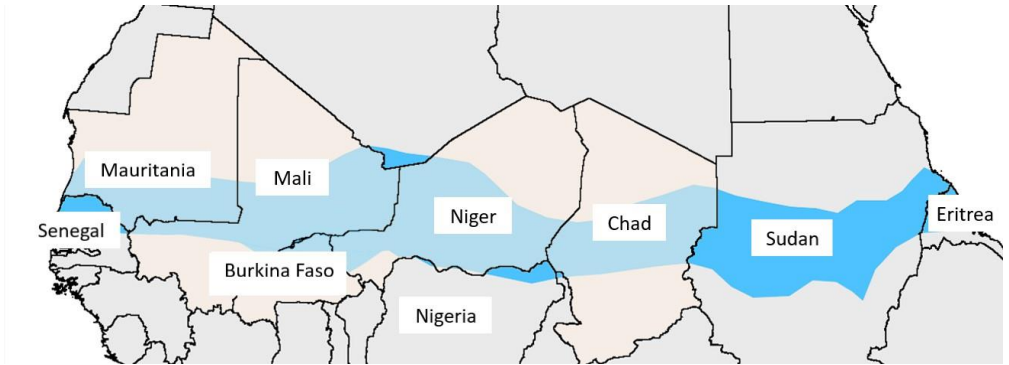
Scientifically based reports state that this area is already suffering severely from climate change and desertification. The UN predicts that on current trends the population of the Sahel region will quadruple in this century, whereas a report of the IPCC states that on present trends the Sahel will be uninhabitable by the end of the century⁷.

Similarly, sea level rise will see millions displaced from low lying fertile land, and major cities flooded. Where will all those people go?

A Dutch newspaper article headed, “In face of rising sea levels the Netherlands must consider controlled withdrawal,” suggests that, “remaining territory will become so overcrowded that many people will need to cross the border.”⁸

The migration crisis has barely begun.

The Sahel region of Africa – between the Sahara and the rainforests.



Courtesy of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

World coastal cities at greatest risk of flooding⁹

1. Tokyo
2. New York
3. Shanghai
4. Kolkata
5. Dhaka
6. Osaka
7. Mumbai
8. Guangzhou
9. Shenzhen
10. Miami.

Other areas high on the list include the Ganges and Nile deltas, parts of the Netherlands and Lincolnshire in the UK.

“The UK is going to go on changing. We shall continue to diversify and increase in number because of migration. There might be more immigration to come.”

Simon Beard. Quaker and global risk researcher (see also Page 43)

We should courageously accept change.

10. “Isn’t this white men telling black women what to do?”

QCOP does not agree with men of any ethnicity telling women of any ethnicity what to do. While many men in all countries accept the equality of women, it is a sad fact that women’s rights over their own lives (and bodies) are under attack by men all around the world. This occurs in politics in states headed by machismo men; in many faith groups; in traditional cultures by men who consider large families a tribute to their own virility, or where practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation are rife.

QCOP believes this situation is totally unacceptable, without exception. QCOP stands up for the rights of women and for their empowerment. In fact, Quakers have always been strong in support of the rights of women especially the poorest and most vulnerable.

Where women’s rights are recognised, where they receive adequate education, and where contraception is properly explained and freely accessible, fertility rates drop, sometimes dramatically as in Bangladesh, for example. See opposite.

The world’s population is currently expanding by 1 billion every 12 years, as fast as it has ever been. This has to be unsustainable. Women’s lack of rights and empowerment is disastrous for them and for all life on Earth. QCOP believes it is not defensible in any way, shape or form.

Case study of Bangladesh

A landmark project was undertaken in the Matlab area of the country. The population of 173,000 was divided into two areas, one experimental area with greatly expanded services with access to high quality family planning with a wide array of contraceptive choices, home visits and follow up care of mother and child. The other area received the standard less intensive services.

The impact was large and immediate with a marked increase in the use of contraceptives; fertility declined rapidly and women's health, household earnings, and use of preventative health care improved. Children were more likely to reach the age of 5 and to attend school than children from households that didn't participate in the experiment.¹⁰

Other Islamic nations such as Ethiopia have sent representatives to conferences in Bangladesh to study how to improve matters at home.

A Guttmacher Institute paper looked at 30 years of data from 108 surveys in 41 developing countries. The analysis showed a wish for family limitation in 20-40% of women in sub-Saharan Africa, where demand for contraception was poorly met; but in 40-60% of women in Latin America, Asia and North Africa. This is one example from a body of research which indicates that, given the choice and the means, women wish to have smaller families.¹¹

11. “Some people associate concern for population with abortion.”

Yes, this is unavoidable. However, abortion is not advocated as a means of managing population numbers. Nonetheless, there is a need for organisations that address family planning to be able to assist people to have abortions if they need them.

If you reduce the availability of safe abortions, you increase the frequency of unsafe abortions, with the resultant consequences of severe and often incurable damage to the health of the mother, or even her death. The best way of reducing the number of abortions is to make proper contraception available, together with the appropriate health care.

Nobody is advocating abortion as a means of birth control, but the right of women to make this choice must not be denied. It is never an easy decision for a woman.

There is no room for complacency!

Whilst Ireland and Northern Ireland only changed the law on abortion in 2019, giving women choice over their own bodies, the right to abortion is being strongly challenged in some states of the USA, such as Alabama.

Some facts from WHO about abortion:

Globally, 25% of all pregnancies ended in abortion in 2010 - 2014. They happen in all countries including where it is illegal in most circumstances.

Nearly one in two abortions is high risk.

According to the latest estimates, 25 million unsafe abortions were performed across the world in 2014, mostly in developing countries.¹²

NGOs that help provide family planning around the world including in the UK:

MSI Reproductive Choices (37 countries)

International Planned Parenthood Federation (189 countries)

There are now 15 methods of contraception available including reversible as well as permanent ones.¹³

12. “We need children now so when they grow up they will be able to contribute to the economy. Without them there will be fiscal collapse.”

Remember that economics is a tool invented by us: it is not an inevitable set of rules. The conventional view of economists that all growth is good is currently being challenged as there is increasing awareness of the fact that you cannot have endless growth in a finite environment. We consume renewable resources at a rate nearly twice as fast as the planet can renew them and non-renewable resources are...non-renewable! This cannot be sustained. Fiscal policy must recognise this.

The aim should be to only have a population size that can live within the resources of the earth and preserve the habitats of other species with whom we share the whole web of life.

The world could support a population of 2 billion living at the present average rate of consumption of the developed world. With the present population of 7.8 billion and rising, there is no hope that the poorest in the world will ever catch up.

A reduction to two billion might seem huge, but we've got to make a start and having a goal helps. Economics should be geared towards that outcome not towards continual growth.

See also Question 16.

“Anyone who believes in indefinite growth in anything physical on a physically finite planet is either mad or an economist.”

(Kenneth Boulding, an American Quaker economist)

The book ‘Limits to Growth’ published by M.I.T¹⁴ lists eight interconnected issues:

1. Population growth - UN estimates: 7.7bn now, 8.5bn by 2030 and 9.7bn by 2050
2. More people seeking a higher standard of living, especially in developing countries. Consumerism in the global North. Increasing trade and air travel.
3. Therefore more industrial output required
4. Therefore more energy needed.
5. Therefore more mining required for oil (therefore plastics), gas, tar, iron, copper, chromium, aluminium, uranium, rare metals, (computers, mobile phones).
6. The problem of feeding a growing population with soil becoming impoverished, loss of top soil, loss of land because of expansion of cities.
7. Pollution of soil, air and sea. Climate change
8. Loss of biodiversity. Extinction of species.

Collated by Tim Baynes, Kendal Meeting

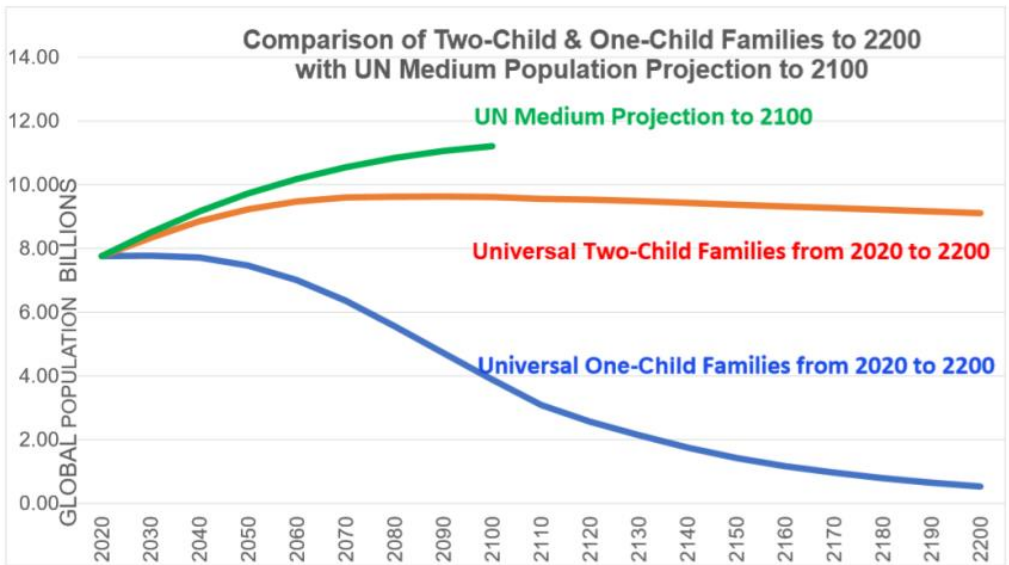
13. “How can we possibly reduce the current population to 2 billion?”

Achieving sustainable numbers on our finite planet is something that ultimately cannot be avoided. It will happen either by fewer births - or billions of deaths.

The demographer J. Kenneth Smail advocates for a ‘well-conceived, clearly articulated, flexibly designed, broadly equitable and internationally co-ordinated programme focused on bringing about a very significant reduction in global human numbers over the next two or more centuries. This should aim at a reduction of from two thirds to three quarters from the expected probable mid-century peak of about ten billion to a future population of two to three billion, or perhaps even fewer, in the twenty-third century or beyond.’¹⁵

In other words this policy is something that would have to be negotiated internationally by the UN and by national governments. But in order to persuade them to do that, there has to be public pressure, of the sort that is presently being shown by those concerned about the climate crisis. For that to happen, we, the public and politicians have to be informed. This is what QCOP and other population organisations, such as Population Matters, are trying to do.

QCOP, like other bodies in this field, has always taken the approach of Change without Coercion.



© Andrew Ferguson/Eric Rimmer 2017

The message behind this graph is clear but the exact figures are awaiting verification.

Suppose we were to achieve an average fertility of 2, global population would continue to rise to just below 10 billion and then slowly decline. An average of one however, would cause a rapid decline bringing down the population to two billion in about 2135.

Of course these are only projections as yet, not predictions.

14. “I really want to have children (or grandchildren). What are you telling me?”

We are not telling you how many children you should have. We are giving you information that might help you in your choice of how many children to have.

Going down the route of having one fewer child than you originally thought, is greener than almost everything else you can do in terms of CO2 saving.

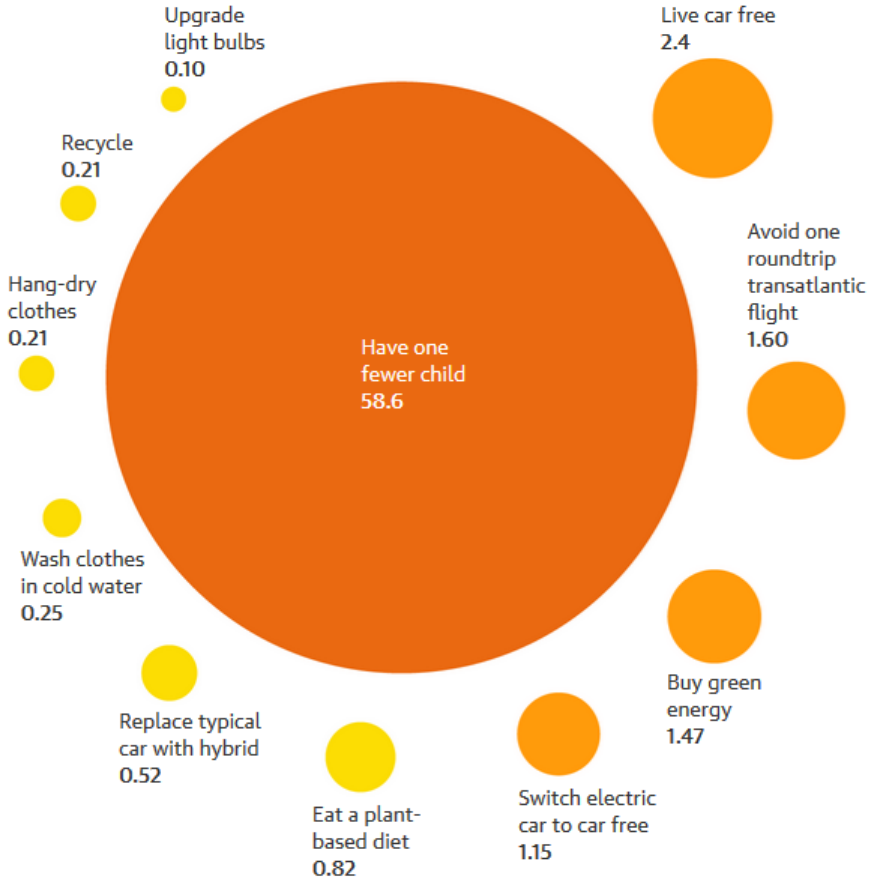
The effect is huge because it continues, through the unconceived child not having greenhouse gas emitting descendants, and the figure takes account of this.

Grandparents need to restrain their desire to have grandchildren. If your child decides to be childfree, this can be a very difficult choice for them and they need support and understanding. Anger is inappropriate here, although grief is understandable.

There are plenty of parentless children in the world who need help from loving and understanding families.

Amount of CO2 saved in different ways¹⁶

Tonnes of CO₂-equivalent per year for one person undertaking each action



Guardian graphic | Source: Wynes & Nicholas, Environmental Research Letters

The graphic shows how much CO₂ can be saved through a range of different actions.

15. “Isn’t an only child a lonely, spoiled child?”

Traditionally, *Homo sapiens* has always been pleased to have large families to help with the family concerns, and to an extent this is still useful. However, there is now greater social mobility, education and independence. Yet many hanker after the ideal of a happy large family. This was perpetuated by a piece of shallow, very subjective but influential research in the late 19th century in the USA.¹⁷

A seminal piece of modern research concluded that “the only child scored significantly better in achievement, motivation and personal adjustment and were in all other respects indistinguishable from children with brothers and sisters.”¹⁸

An only child benefits from greater parental attention and resources. Are they lonely? Reports say they have the same number of friends and are more frequently chosen for playground teams.¹⁹

Are they spoiled? Studies indicate not particularly and suggest that only children, for lack of competition, have always been heard at home and therefore function in a very calm way.

Collated by Cherry Foster, Nailsworth Meeting

Facing up to the dilemma

With the availability of contraceptives we are able to satisfy our sexual needs without producing children. However the instinct to have and nurture family is strong in animal species, with a powerful emotional element.

Nonetheless, the logic and message of the graphs on pages 31, and 33 is undeniable. We cannot continue to overburden our life support system, planet Earth.

There truly is no Planet B.

The experience of the coronavirus year, (2020), when schools were closed and children were isolated from their friends has underlined that for healthy development, children need real, not just virtual children to play with.

There are old models at hand to guide us. Until the industrial revolution, children grew up in settled larger family or village units with siblings, cousins and neighbours. Some modern communities share child care, meal times and house work. There is a network of government-supported nursery schools supplying good childhood interaction. For parents sure of their need for larger families, many find fulfilment in adopting or fostering.

For couples who choose to be childfree, there is still satisfaction in jobs and other contacts with children. There is also plenty of online group support for childfree people.

16. “We need children now so that when they grow up they will be able to look after the increasing older population.”

The trouble with this idea is that when these children grow old they will need looking after also which will demand even more children to look after them. People need support at both ends of their lives. This is an argument for an ever increasing population which is not sustainable.

Another point is that a youngster will be dependent for at least fifteen years, perhaps even twenty years. An old person might be independent to the very last: not many will be dependent for as long as at the start of their life.

Several nations such as Japan, Hungary, Germany, Greece and South Korea are now facing the unfamiliar situation of depopulation, which they perceive as a problem.

Depopulation Benefits

More optimistic views of depopulation are now emerging. A 2018 survey in *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*²⁰ summarised various studies suggesting that the problems associated with ageing are overstated and are manageable. Analyses show that the economic, social and environmental benefits of smaller populations are substantial. Smaller human populations ‘open possibilities to create even better societies which are sustainable over the long term’.

Reinforcing these views, an article in *The Guardian*²¹ cites Professor Sarah Harper who says ‘Declining fertility round the world should be a cause for celebration not alarm... AI [artificial intelligence] and robotics mean that work is moving away from industrial jobs, meaning efforts need to go into the education of the young, not boosting procreation’.

It is easier to enable older adults to stay upskilled, healthy and in the labour market than it is to cope with the environmental problems of overpopulation.

June New, Jesus Lane Meeting, Cambridge.

17. “I am beyond child bearing age. What can I do? “

Join QCOP to learn more about the issue and help us spread the word.

Make donations to MSI Reproductive Choices, UNICEF etc to help pay for family planning clinics.

Support charities paying for education for disadvantaged girls.



Be part of the solution and start ripples to help Culture Change. We have the greatest influence on those nearest to us. Encourage the realisation that we need to radically alter many things but especially how we think of family size.

Be ready to support and encourage those who find these ideas distressing and anxiety or anger provoking.

“Talk about it. Just keep on talking about it.”

David Attenborough

Grandparents too can have a lot of anger about the situation; frustrations that they want so much to have grandchildren but their children have perhaps chosen to be childfree.

However, grandparents can also be very supportive and understanding. Their experience in living simpler more sustainable lives is needed, as is their memory of seeing more wildlife, such as hedgehogs, toads on roads, insects on windscreens, moths at night, owls and yellowhammers.

Culture change

Public support has encouraged many significant changes, often in the law. Here are a few examples: slavery, women's rights and universal suffrage, smoking, diet change, supermarket plastic bag use, takeaway coffee cups.

The Ripple Effect

For culture change to have a chance, we can use the technology-free system of just talking. Saying to a neighbour, "My son has chosen to only have one child", will be noted and passed on locally; the idea and acceptance of it by the speaker, has a great influence.

This creates ripples we cannot foresee.

Social media is probably the technology of choice for many and is hugely and quickly effective, if a little uncontrolled.

We recommend that we should all take every opportunity to talk about the dangers of population growth.

18. “If your cause is valid, how come out of 30,000 Quakers and Attenders in Britain, you have just over 140 members?”

Many Quakers are fully committed to concerns such as social justice, refugees, prison welfare and peace. They often feel they cannot take on more.

We recognise and understand that to many Quakers population is very challenging. Objections are varied and include unfair suggestions that population activists are racist and white supremacists, and that their policies show lack of sensitivity for those with large families, and ignore the other concerns of consumption, inequality and climate emergency etc.

However, QCOP see population numbers as a considerable driver of the last three and hence something that cannot be ignored.

We gain most members through regional and Yearly Meeting events, and personal contact is also vital for pastoral outreach where needed. The written word in *The Friend*, our Newsletters and on the website and Facebook brings in more Friends. Becoming a Recognised Quaker Body opened many doors.

Top 5 solutions to climate change

98.7



Wind Turbines

70.53



Reduced Food Waste



102.96*

Women's Empowerment

(FAMILY PLANNING & EDUCATING GIRLS)



89.74

Refrigerant Management



66.11

Plant-rich Diet



Every choice counts

*CO₂-equivalent reduction by 2050 (GT)

Source: Project Drawdown, 2017

populationmatters.org

Courtesy of Population Matters

At Britain Yearly Meeting in 2011, Quakers agreed in the Canterbury Commitment, “to act in new ways - individually, as local communities, as a corporate body of faith, and politically. It recognised that the environmental crisis is enmeshed with global economic injustice and that tackling inequality is central to taking action on climate change.” QCOP is working to raise awareness of the place of population in this effort. ²²

19. “So who are the Quakers?”

Quakers (officially, the Religious Society of Friends) are a religious community of about 30,000 in the UK. We started over 350 years ago and have considerable experience of peace work and conflict resolution. Our activism is grounded in the stillness of our quiet Meetings for Worship. The opening words of our Advices to each other are “Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God.” Facing the truth about our planet, we are prompted to respond lovingly and faithfully.

Quakers work for peace and justice, and for reconciliation of conflicts, because a peaceful world gives us all the best chance to live fully and happily, flourishing in harmony with the Earth. We respect the dignity of every human being, because we believe that each person can respond to the Divine Light. We grieve for the state of our Earth. We have committed ourselves as a community to living simply, so that others may simply live, and so that together we can repair the ravaged continents and seas. This isn't easy - we all need to encourage each other to change our ways of thinking and living.

Necessary shifts include thinking about our rapidly growing human population, and changing our attitude to family size. This opens up all sorts of questions and emotional reactions, which QCOP sets out to discuss and answer in this booklet.

Beth Allen, Bromley Meeting

Simon Beard, a Quaker philosopher and researcher into global risk at Cambridge University, spoke at a QCOP Special Interest meeting at London Yearly Meeting, May 2019. He said this:

“There are three important messages for Quakers:

1. We need to talk about population because it matters and it is a difficult subject.
2. We need to have the humanity to view the demographic transition as more than just an end in itself. It can be very painful personally.
3. We need to have the courage to accept that our own society will alter radically and that it may be better if it changes more, than if it changes less.

Change is very hard, and it alters people...

Our country is going to go on changing. We shall continue to diversify and increase in number because of migration. There might be more immigration to come. We should courageously seek **more** change.” (Simon Beard.)

20. What relevance has religion or faith to the population / environment crisis?

Actually a lot. We cannot truly “love our neighbour” if we deny environmental and climate justice to our neighbour overseas (who already suffers most from climate disruption), or our future neighbour, who will receive from us an unsustainably over-populated and thereby trashed planet.

Ensuring best practice in rights-based contraceptive care for all so that there are not overwhelmingly too many future ‘neighbours’ competing together for what is left of the finite earth is a good and practical way to love them all, current and future.

Adapted from John Guilebaud www.ecotimecapsule.com

21. “But what is your message?”

Our message is to encourage responsible choices on family size. Smaller families worldwide really can fix it and a smaller population can make a better future for our children.

Our aim is to highlight the inter-dependence of over-consumption, inequality, climate change and over-population. Population growth makes environmental problems worse and it makes people poorer. Fewer consumers helps to reduce consumption and brings closer the goal of living in sustainable societies.

Choice, education and empowerment are at the very heart of our message.²³

22. Admittedly an unlikely question from a Friend: “Do you not have faith that God will provide?”

God has already provided us with the ability to foresee the problem and to do something about it. The ball is in our court.

Roger Plenty, Nailsworth Meeting, at London Yearly Meeting 2019.



Roger had worried about the population issue for about 50 years, before it was finally recognised as a Quaker Concern. This led to the creation of QCOP and to its establishment as a Quaker Recognised Body.

Useful Quotes

“We can no longer ignore the fact that the planet is finite.”

Epistle of Britain Yearly Meeting 2012

“It’s our population growth that underlies just about every single one of the problems that we’ve inflicted on the planet. If there were just a few of us, then the nasty things we do wouldn’t really matter and Mother Nature would take care of it - but there are so many of us.”

Jane Goodall

“It’s no use reducing our carbon footprint, if we keep on increasing the number of feet.”

Roger Martin when President of Population Matters.

“If fully implemented, the [*Green*] revolution can provide sufficient food for sustenance during the next three decades [*from 1970*]. But the frightening power of human reproduction must also be curbed; otherwise the success of the Green Revolution will be ephemeral only.”

Norman Borlaug, initiator of the Green Revolution

“As a woman leader, I thought I brought a different kind of leadership. I was interested in women's issues, in bringing down the population growth rate... as a woman, I entered politics with an additional dimension - that of a mother”

Benazir Bhutto – first female Prime Minister of an Islamic state.

“Family planning could bring more benefits to more people at less cost than any other single technology now available to the human race”.

UNICEF Report, 1992

“One would have thought that it was even more necessary to limit population than property... The neglect of this subject, which in existing states is so common, is a never failing cause of poverty among the citizens; and poverty is the parent of both revolution and crime.”

Aristotle – Philosopher 384-322 BC.

“All environmental problems become harder — and ultimately impossible — to solve with ever more people.”

David Attenborough

“Democracy cannot survive overpopulation. Human dignity cannot survive it. Convenience and decency cannot survive it. As you put more and more people into the world, the value of life not only declines, but it disappears. It doesn't matter if someone dies.”

Isaac Asimov –Biochemist, author

“We cannot confront the massive challenges of poverty, hunger, disease and environmental destruction unless we address issues of population and reproductive health.”

Thoraya Obaid - UN Under-Secretary General 200 – 2010

"The biggest cause of climate change is climate changers: human beings. Deciding to stop at two children, or at least to have one child less, is the simplest, quickest and most significant thing any of us could do to leave a sustainable and habitable planet for our children and grandchildren"²⁴

John Guillebaud - Emeritus professor in Family Planning and Reproductive Health at UCL

Reading list on Global Population

Full Planet, Empty Plates: The New Geopolitics of Food Scarcity, by Lester R Brown, *Publ. Norton & Co, New York and London, 2012.*

'One of the consequences of this explosive growth in human numbers is that human demands have outrun the carrying capacity of the economy's natural support systems'

Countdown, Our Last, Best Hope for a Future on Earth? by Alan Weisman. *Publ. Little, Brown Book Group, 2013.*

'With a million more of us every four and a half days, our planet's not getting any bigger, and... prospects for a sustainable human future seem ever more in doubt'

Maybe one, by Bill McKibben. *Publ. Plume, 1999.*

A sensitively reasoned plea in support of one child families in which he demonstrates that single children are no more likely to be damaged than anyone else.

Life on the Brink, Environmentalists confront overpopulation, edited by Philip Cafaro and Eileen Crist, *Publ. University of Georgia Press, 2012.*

An important book of some twenty four essays by a variety of authorities including Paul and Anne Ehrlich, Albert Bartlett, Dave Foreman, Lester Brown, Bill Ryerson.

More: Population, Nature and What Women Want, by Robert Engelman. *Publ. Island Press, 2010.*

If there is one thing that this book makes clear, it is that putting into women's hands the power to make choices about their own bodies results in reduced fertility. It destroys at a stroke the canard that population action is 'sexist' or

consists of 'rich white men telling poor black women what to do'

Move Upstream: A call to solve overpopulation, by Karen Shragg. *Publ. Freethought House, 2015.*

Karen Shragg does not mess around. She immediately asserts that all our green activities are doomed to failure unless we address population growth at the same time. Green efforts treat the symptom: she calls these efforts 'downstream'. To have effect one must tackle the cause 'upstream', the fact that there are too many of us.

A Farewell to Ice- A Report from the Arctic, by Peter Wadhams. *Publ. Oxford University Press, 2017.*

Population is addressed in the chapter 'The State of the Planet'. 'Since Africa cannot feed itself now, how will it cope with four times as many mouths...? The answer is that it won't. Given that the rest of the world is likely to be obsessed with its own problems, one can see a shortage of compassion and aid: the result will inevitably be famine on a massive scale.'

The End Game, by Anthony D Barnosky and Elizabeth A Hadley. *Publ. William Collins, 2015.*

What combination of problems will trigger widespread wars and even societal collapse? We have a chance to avoid the tipping point. 'End Game' is the call to action that we need.

Save the Earth: don't give birth, by Jonathan Austen. *Independently Published, 2018.*

Despite the jokey title, this is a good comprehensive book, not over-technical and easy to read.

Post Carbon Reader, edited by Richard Heinberg and Daniel Leach. *Publ. Watershed Media, 2010.*

A book that should be in every meeting house library. It has sixteen articles on various aspects of the crisis now upon us, one of which is 'Population, the multiplier of everything else', by Bill Ryerson, who is the founder of Population Media Center. He notes that advocates of reduction of population growth are attacked by the Left for supposedly ignoring human rights and glossing over consumption, and attacked by the Right for supposedly causing widespread abortion, promoting promiscuity and harming economic growth.

The World We Made by Jonathan Porritt. *Phaidon Press Ltd. 2013*

It helps to have a vision of life in a more sustainable world. Try this topic based and very readable book.

Should we control world population? Diana Coole, Polity Press, ISBN-13: 978-1-5095-2340-5

The author admits that the title of this book is deliberately provocative. Nevertheless, it is a profoundly fair book. It is erudite but readable, and discusses seriously every aspect of the debate, drawing the conclusion that a case can be made for reducing our numbers in ways that are compatible with human rights. One of the best books on the subject.

References

A note on Tinyurls: These are a way of converting a long URL to something more manageable. They should function in exactly the same way as a full URL. See tinyurl.com

¹ P15 Government of Kerala State Planning Board Economic Review 2016. (tinyurl.com/3vc4fluu)

² P15 on Brazil. From a Council on Foreign Relations blog, on Soap Operas as Edutainment, on tinyurl.com/sc7chd5

³ P18 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Rosling

⁴ P18 Critiques on Rosling's work agree that his selection of statistics is too positively biased, avoids analysis of negative trends and refrains from discussing difficult issues, such as the ecological consequences of the current type of growth and the risks related to the continued global population growth. Climate change is not sufficiently regarded in his work. tinyurl.com/v84ewar

⁵ P20 Norton H, Quillen E, Dunsworth H. *Evolution, Education and Outreach* 2019: **12**; 17. Human races are not like dog breeds: refuting a racist analogy.

⁶ P20 Florence Naluyimba Blondel, Journalist for Life, Health Campaigner & Development - LSE.

⁷ P22 <https://www.prb.org/sahel-demographics/>

⁸ P22 <https://www.vn.nl/rising-sea-levels-netherlands/>

⁹ P23 “Coastal cities at greatest risk of flooding” Courtesy OECD Environment Working Paper No. 1 (ENV/WKP(2007)1). Different criteria produce different cities. This site has a different list of cities: tinyurl.com/p8x877y

See also this OECD report on tinyurl.com/snqq5qo

¹⁰ P25 “Family planning - a key to prosperity,” tinyurl.com/st33rzz

¹¹ P25 Westoff C. F, Bankole A. Trends in the Demand for Family Limitation in Developing Countries. *International Perspectives in Reproductive Health* June 2000; 24: 36-62.

¹² P27 These figures appear to have come originally from the Guttmacher Institute; see tinyurl.com/vmdxege

¹³ P27 Information from John Guillebaud, Emeritus Professor of Family Planning at University College London.

¹⁴ P29 Massachusetts Institute of Technology: “The Limits to Growth” (Meadows et al., 1972)

¹⁵ P30 J. Kenneth Smail’s essay ‘Confronting the inevitable: Population reduction, voluntary or otherwise’, (tinyurl.com/qjem8qb),

¹⁶ P33 tinyurl.com/y3grncea

¹⁷ P34 Granville Stanley Hall. b. 1844 “A study of Peculiar and Exceptional children”. (As referenced in Bill McKibben’s *Maybe One*.)

¹⁸ P34 Modern research by Denise Polit and Toni Falbo, “Only Children and Personality Development”.

¹⁹ P34 “One child, plenty of company”, tinyurl.com/rfjxywx

²⁰ P37 “Trends in Ecology and Evolution” Nov 2018, vol 33, pp851-862 by Gotmark, Cafaro & O’Sullivan

²¹ P37 An article published in The Guardian by Nicola Davis (26 Dec 2018) citing Prof Sarah Harper. tinyurl.com/1t18ocsc.

²² P41. Quaker website on Our Faith and Sustainability <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/sustainability/our-faith-and-sustainability>

²³ P44 Inspired by the Population Matters Policy Document.

²⁴ P47 www.ecotimecapsule.com/pagecontents/pdfs/youthquake.pdf