

Dealing With Climate Grief.

Peak Human – the implications of a growing population and when will it level off?

It is a common trope pedalled by the Climate Sceptics in the pay of the Fossil Fuel Industry to delay serious action to address the Climate Crisis that there is little point in us taking action when the real problem is growing populations in the less developed world. It is too easy to fall into this Malthusian trap of blaming others and becoming helpless.

The UN projections suggest that the world population is likely to grow to between 9.4 and 12.7 billion people by 2100. <https://population.un.org/wpp> and <https://ourworldindata.org/future-population-growth>

What are the implications and what can we do?

Populations of animals usually increase till the “carrying capacity” is reached i.e. till the environment can no longer provide enough of essentials of life. Populations then fall back to a stable level. Humans, starting with the development of agriculture and onwards have been able to invent new ways to provide the essentials of life this increasing the carrying capacity of our environments. We are now fast approaching or indeed exceeding the carrying capacity of our planet as evidenced by climate change, loss of biodiversity and other calamities. Humans are now using 1.7 times the resources that the earth can regenerate each year. To make a financial analogy we are using up the “earth’s capital”. There is a clear need to level off population growth in order to provide existing populations with a fair share of what they need to live.

In past centuries, as food supplies have increased, birth rates have increased. Death rates remained high, due to floods, droughts and disease. With increased industrialisation, birth rates remained high but death rates reduced due to medical improvements and better living conditions. Then as people experienced more material wealth birth rates fall while death rates remain low.

This has resulted in a massive increase in human population in the 20th Century. The acceleration peaked in 1962 and since then birth rate and family size has halved. Nevertheless, both have remained high enough, together with increased life expectancy, to ensure further population increase.

Current projections suggest that we will reach “Peak Human” (the moment when our population stops growing for the first time since the invention of farming) early in the 22nd Century with 3.2 billion more people.

However, the Wittgenstein Centre in Austria has calculated that we **could** achieve Peak Human by 2064 levelling at 8.9 billion provided certain actions are taken.

<https://pure.iiasa.ac.at/id/eprint/6361/> [https://www.thelancet.com/article/S0140-6736\(20\)30677-2/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/article/S0140-6736(20)30677-2/fulltext) and for a digestible overview

<https://thenewdaily.com.au/life/2021/09/12/peak-humanity-stats-guy/> These actions include ensuring that people in less developed countries where birth rates are currently high have improved lives by improving health, transport and energy security based on the Doughnut model of economy which protects the environment as well as people.

<https://doughnuteconomics.org/about-doughnut-economics> (this was the subject of one

of WFGA workshops in 2021). Most important of all, if education systems in the poorest nations develop as quickly as they did in Developed nations in the 20th Century. The education of women is particularly important. Girls who stay in school longer are less likely to marry young and to have as many children.

What about voluntary or enforced birth control I hear you say! I was surprised to learn that while the China “One Child Policy” brought the fertility rate from 6 down to 1, nearby Taiwan achieved a greater drop in birth rate over the same time period as the result of economic development <https://ourworldindata.org/fertility-rate#coercive-policy-interventions>

What can we do as individuals?

We can support Charities working to address poverty and improve education in the poorer countries of the world, particularly those that support women and girls. I am currently supporting <https://lendwithcare.org>

How can we use our consumer power?

Try to make sure that products we buy that have been grown or made abroad are produced ethically and fairly in order to support sustainable economic development and reduce poverty. <https://www.fairtrade.org.uk> is a good starting point and other schemes are available.

Educate Ourselves.

Find out more about these issues. Population Matters is a good place to start. Their “mythbuster” section is particularly informative. <https://populationmatters.org>

Lobby and Protest.

Write to your MPs to urge them to support the restoration of the UK Foreign Aid budget to 7% of Gross National Income. It was announced in November 2021 that it would be reduced to 5% (a cut of between £4bn and £5bn) per annum till at least 2024. This of course broke a pledge in the Conservative Manifesto of 2019. Many MPs of all parties opposed this cut. Make sure that your MP is one of them. Join protests about unfair treatment of women, particularly those that call for better educational opportunities.

John Rhymer