

IUSSP Debate:

"The population of humans that can be supported sustainably on the planet at a reasonable standard of living is below 4 billion." Yes or No.

Wednesday 18 October 2023

Questions asked in the Q&A

Jane O'Sullivan:

Is it not a straw man argument to say we can't get to 4 billion any time soon? If environmental damage is proportional to the time and extent that we spend above the sustainable population, is it not important both to know when we're in overshoot and to appreciate the actions we can take to peak sooner and lower, to minimise the person-years in overshoot?

Steven Kurtz:

Policies can manipulate human behavior to some extent, but do those thinking more than 4 B is a sustainable number believe that we are exempt from The Maximum Power Principle (Lotka, Odum, Rees, and others) which applies to all known living symptoms?

Edwige Mandondo:

1. As we debate sustainable population levels, how pivotal is the role of technological innovation and its management in ensuring a reasonable standard of living for all?
2. What project management strategies can be employed to drive and manage technological innovations that cater to high population densities, especially in areas with limited resources?

Celine Delacroix:

Humans are imperfect, and inefficiency in its many forms (corruption, food waste, wrong technology choices, conflicts etc.) is with us for the long term. Why base carrying capacity discussions on an utopian outlook that is most likely to never reflect real circumstances?

Idrissa Kabore:

In this debate, it seems that human intelligence is fixed, and therefore without capacity of creativity and innovation. Does everyone need the same reasonable standard of living?

William Pan:

Many of these models assume some equal distribution of resources and even distribution of people. Alternatively, can we ask what the carrying capacity of each major regional biome is? I.e., what is the capacity of the Amazon? SSA? Western Europe? Etc...

Theodore Lianos:

In the presentation of Timothy and Jacques I did not hear an argument on the basis of which I would say that more than 4 billion is Ok with sustainability and good life. Can they elaborate?

Cody Peluso:

How does capitalism and patriarchy play into the role of what a healthy population is? Shouldn't we just let women decide what they want to do with their own bodies, and do everything we can to support that, in everything we do, for a healthier planet?

Comment by Yingyi Lin:

Nancy Qian's work shows that women-led economy benefits children more. So I also wonder if economists' work surrounding resource scarcity also consider "who" produce the resource and control the distribution of resource

Marian Starkey:

The projections that show population peaking later this century assume rapid declines in birth rates in high-fertility settings. According to the Guttmacher Institute, we are under-funding international family planning programs by \$5.5 billion each year. For fertility rates to decline the way the projections assume they will, people need access to safe, affordable, appropriate contraceptives and the education to use them properly and manage side effects. Shouldn't voluntary family planning services be part of any comprehensive sustainability effort?

Maria Grace:

For Frank: When in human history did we have a population of 3 billion and what was life like then?

Nandita Bajaj:

The over-reliance on technology fails to acknowledge the massive failures of the so called "green revolution" and "green growth". Jacques and Timothy, what are your thoughts on the precautionary principle and the fallacy of decoupling that Anastasia mentioned?

Kola Oyediran:

@Anastasia, what role do you think bad governance play in the DRC situation?

Comment by Jane O'Sullivan:

And what role does rapid population growth, leading to high unemployment and the inability to provide basic services, have in causing volatile political situations and bad governance? Evidently we can't say "it's not population growth, it's bad governance" because both are related.

Joice Melo Vieira:

The question of the seminar is equivocate. The question is what is a "good life" in each region and who will pay the bill for others have a "wonderful" life.

Nandita Bajaj:

I would also love to hear the views of any of the panelists on the patriarchal culture of "coercive pronatalism" that has been at the heart of population growth and reproductive exploitation, whether for the growth of religious, economic, or nationalistic agendas.

Tom Cameron:

Is the fundamental problem with the disconnect between our population size and climate disaster and species extinction our claim of human exceptionalism that distances us from all the rest of creation?

Robert Wyman:

World population has been growing at 1 billion/dozen years. Perfectly straight line since ~1960. UN predicts a downturn by end of the century. Maybe? Future fertility depends on social arrangements. The most fragile thing that human make is our social arrangements. Right now global social arrangements are falling apart. For instance, consider the rise of far right governments in US and Europe. Why? In all cases the demagogues win by appeal to anti-immigration sentiments. The migration of desperately poor people from the overpopulated parts of the world. As society falls apart, the conditions that have promoted lower fertility are disappearing. The outlook for lower population is questionable. Right now, do participants believe that more or less efforts should be put into encouraging people to lower their fertility.

James Wagner:

For the Yes team: Germany and Croatia have a decent standard of living, correct? What are they doing to reduce their populations? I agree with Timothy in the sense that we need realism—these would seem to be real examples of how we can reduce population— why not put our focus on how to achieve the (likely) necessary reduction in global population.