

IUSSP Debate: Since the ICPD in 1994, has too little attention been paid to rapid population growth?

Q&A

1. What different is needed in each place around the world to 1) fill bellies, 2) uphold educated, honoring fertility choices, in women and men, 3) create the means to manifest those choices, and 4) create a path toward further education and fulfilment? This is not an either/or choice, but a both/and. We probably all want children (and adults) to thrive now and in the future. We need a healthy ecosystem to do this. In a healthy ecosystem all parts are in balanced relationship with each other, with redundancy creating resiliency. Currently we are in significant overshoot, where we do not have redundancy when things fail (like crops or fresh water). Human population is putting unsustainable stress on the relationships of the ecosystem—water sanitation, food, jobs, education, wildlife, soil, and the future viability of Earth overall. One average person in 1900, because of longer life spans and lower child mortality, is equivalent to 5 people today. That same person in 1900, because of energy consumption, is equiv."

- Pam Pence

2. The debate question is "has too little attention been paid to rapid population growth?" My question is: by whom? For each side: Which types of actors are you thinking of when you make your respective arguments? Are there groups/institutions that are paying comparatively more (or less) attention to population growth which you think complicate your respective positions?

- Sam Sellers

3. It might be true, as Steven Sinding said, that only one continent still has above replacement fertility. But it is also true that the majority of children continue to be born in countries with above-replacement fertility, and that will remain true to 2050 according to the UN's medium projection. Those countries are poor, and getting poorer as a result of their population growth. It is unconscionable that the world community refuses to address forthrightly the root cause of intractable poverty for the majority of the next generation of humans.

- Jane O'Sullivan

4. The ICPD Programme of Action includes several positive mentions of the concept of "population stabilization", including paragraph 1.11, which highlights "the crucial contribution that early stabilization of the world population would make towards the achievement of sustainable development. At the same time, the only relevant mention of "targets" in the document is the following: "Demographic goals, while legitimately the subject of government development strategies, should not be imposed on family-planning providers in the form of targets or quotas for the recruitment of clients." (Paragraph 7.12) Why has this narrow and limited notion of targets been interpreted broadly, in the 3 decades since the Cairo conference, to imply that demographic targets and objectives should not be a motivating force of public policy?

- John Wilmoth

5. Since 1994, a major change has been the shift of many developing economies from manufacturing to services. Manufacturing is often capable of productively absorbing large numbers of workers, while it is harder for countries to increase productivity in the service sector (though it can be done, as scholars like Dani Rodrik have argued). How does this shift in political economy change our perceptions as to whether "too little" attention has been paid to population growth given that it may be harder now than in 1994 for countries to integrate rapidly growing populations into productive economic activity?

- Sam Sellers

6. The idea that expressing concern about population growth or acting to reduce it undermines women's reproductive rights is a straw man argument. The two goals are highly synergistic, and that synergy has been enjoyed by all the countries that pursued voluntary family planning to reduce fertility. Those who insist concern about population is "the problem" have done huge harm to the achievement of reproductive rights.

- Jane O'Sullivan

7. Yes. Since the 1994 Cairo Conference, the global conversation has rightly shifted toward reproductive rights and individual wellbeing, but rapid population growth remains a major development challenge in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and Western Asia. UN projections show Sub-Saharan Africa's population could increase by 79% between 2024 and 2054. This means greater pressure on education, healthcare, jobs, infrastructure and other essential services. The issue therefore deserves renewed attention.

- Jedidiah Zoaka

8. Why is the prevailing way of looking at replacement level on the basis of generation to generation, rather than from year to year? With 2 children per woman there will be as many people in the next generation as the previous one, but if the lifespan is increasing, the total population will still increase. In my country we have a fertility rate way below the replacement level, yet the population keeps growing. This is very confusing to people (politicians and journalists included). If we by a "stable population" mean a population that's neither increasing nor declining, wouldn't it make more sense to use a dynamic replacement level, that takes changes in lifespan into account, rather than the static 2.1?

- Henrik Sandgren

9. Nobody is blaming Africans for climate change (African myself). Recognizing that rapid population growth has implications for development, resources, and sustainability is not the same thing as blaming a continent or its people. Surely, we can have a more nuanced debate than that.

- Florence Blondel

10. The idea that "pronatalism is on the rise" fails to recognize that pronatalism has been the oldest form of reproductive control in women's lives, fuelled by political, religious, and economic interests for millennia to drive population growth. The ICPD's statement, "all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly" their family size assumes that prior to the population policies of the last century, women had "freedom" over their bodies. By dismissing the population factor, feminists at ICPD essentially provided cover for the religious and political interests to carry on the thousands of years of women's exploitation to fuel population growth. By conflating the coercive population policies of last century (which were an outlier and not the norm), ICPD inaccurately tainted all family-planning policies as "coercive", leading to the disastrous drop in the funding of family planning and reproductive health care, thereby undermining its own purported goal of elevating reproductive rights.

- Nandita Bajaj

11. The 'No' side needs to update their arguments to reflect reality. Those advocating for progressive population action are not blaming poor Africans for the climate crisis. Climate change is just one of many environmental issues, many of which have much stronger links with population growth. Biodiversity loss and natural resource depletion are happening fastest in the areas with the most rapid human population increase, for example. Regarding climate change, the fastest growing areas are those experiencing the worst climate impacts. This means that empowering population action is key to saving lives. It's not about allocating blame. It's about preventing suffering, saving lives and ensuring future generations can live safely on this planet.

- Florence Blondel

12. Is it possible that insufficient understanding of population trends from policymakers and donors is linked to declines in global finance for family planning, particularly as part of ODA? Do we believe that key decisionmakers with responsibility for funding and programs in family planning are fully aware that the largest generation in history is now entering their reproductive years?

- Kathleen Mogelgaard

13. I think this debate has achieved what should be an important element of debates on imp topics like this - a convergence of views. all speakers understand the complexity of the question and the futility (and danger) of actually taking extreme positions. Extreme positions are good for debates, but the end point should be convergence - which is what we have here.

- Alaka Basu

14-15. All 4 debaters focused on humans, which is important. However, we humans are members of just one of several million species. We are causing the extinction of other species at a rate of about 1000 times

normal. This is proof that we are overpopulated. There are over 120 million unintended pregnancies globally, annually. The problem actually is "growth." Today's low-fertilist alarmism is proof that women's reproductive autonomy, which is driving birth rates to fall in many countries, is a threat to institutions of power, who have relied on their reproductive labor for this "growth" for millennia. The reactionary rise in coercive pronatalist policies is precisely being driven by the growth obsession of political and religious leaders. By not understanding that growthism, patriarchy, and women's exploitation are intertwined, the No side is only looking at the last century of history and not the last 5,000-year history of patriarchy. This is the same failure embedded in ICPD.

- Nandita Bajaj

16. Vanessa Di Lego presents population-motivated birth control programs as if they were all coercive sterilisation programs, and states it doesn't work. She claims a focus purely on reproductive rights is more effective at lowering fertility. Empirical evidence before and after Cairo do not support her assertions. Earlier FP programs were more effective at both advancing reproductive rights and reducing fertility.

- Jane O'Sullivan

17. Ms. Rhoda, Are there any other observations besides the one regarding Nigeria, which shows a positive trend in fertility rates? Could you provide any further insights based on your presentation?

- Emmanuel Juakaly

18. Misinterpreting the recent expansion of free access to medically assisted reproduction in Hungary as merely a pronatalism act is unfair and hardly supports the 'No' side's arguments for human-rights. RH service provision including accessible MAR should be valued without ideologically polarized lens

- Fan Yang

19. I have problems with many words in our vocabulary on this subject -just one eg: what do we mean by 'informed 'choice?

- Alaka Basu

20. Even though substantial progress has been achieved since 1994, the world has not realized the ICPD vision and major gaps remain in reproductive health access, maternal and child health and gender equality which are the most effective and ethical pathways to sustainable population and development outcomes

- Melvine Ouyo

21. Thanks for organizing this discussion

- William Ryerson

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