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Aminaa and FP client explaining contraceptive pills via Pathfinder International

Why ‘Population Matters’

Contributions from Richard Grossman and Roger Martin

What is nearest and dearest to your heart: is it animal rights and concern about the extinction of so many species? Do you stay up at night worrying about human rights and reproductive justice? Do you get hot around the collar when you think about climate change? Or is it pollution and toxification of our environment? For each of these issues, one thing is undeniable. Population matters.

Human population growth is the basis for so many problems that we face today, and that are posed to prove even greater burdens in the future. Human population growth, combined with our extravagant consumption, have caused major changes to the world around us: altering the climate, degrading habitats, overexploiting resources, and reducing biodiversity. As much as we currently struggle with these issues the full effect of many will be felt not by us but by our progeny. Behind these issues, tirelessly driving them is human population growth.

While human population numbers and growth are concerning in and of themselves, another pressing issue is how much of this growth is perpetuated by unintended pregnancies. In the USA it is estimated that over half of pregnancies are unplanned ⁱ. More than 200 million women worldwide would like to have more control over their fertility but don’t have access to modern family planning methods ⁱⁱ. This lack causes 40% of pregnancies to be unplanned worldwide ⁱⁱⁱ. Limited access to family planning and the burden of unplanned pregnancies tie in closely with barriers to gender equity, poverty alleviation, and improved maternal and child health outcomes ⁱⁱ. In these ways, population also matters on the individual and household level.

Despite the importance of our numbers to the world we live in, relatively little attention is paid to human population. Fortunately there are two national, environmentally-focused organizations in the USA that buck this trend and have significant population programs: the Sierra Club and the [Center for Biological Diversity](#). In addition there are other organizations that focus on population issues, such as the Population Media Center.

In Great Britain the most important nonprofit organization focusing on human population is Population Matters. Population Matters is a membership organization that has existed for more than 20 years, known as the Optimum Population Trust until 2011. Population Matters' vision "is of a sustainable future, including decent living standards for all, environmental sustainability and a stable population living within resource constraints." The group is actively engaged in education, research, lobbying and campaigning to achieve the goals of universal access to family planning services, an end to discrimination against women throughout the world, and global convergence in living standards. To learn more about Population Matters, visit their informative and beautiful website at www.populationmatters.org, or contact them at enquiries@populationmatters.org*.

On the other side of the Atlantic you can find a newspaper column "Population Matters!" It has been appearing in the Durango (Colorado) Herald since 1995. Written by a local obstetrician-gynecologist, Richard Grossman, it is probably the only regularly appearing newspaper column dealing with human population issues in the world. Dr. Grossman has recently shared his perspective on pressing topics such as the need to ensure voluntary participation in family planning programs and state-level antiabortion laws. For those who do not read the Herald regularly, the essays are also distributed by email to people around the world. If you would like to join that listserv, please contact Grossman at: richard@population-matters. Past essays are available at: www.population-matters.org*.

Both Population Matters, and "Population Matters!" are actively involved with the MAHB. You can follow Dr. Grossman's essays through the RSS feed, "[Population Matters!](#)" and you can connect with Population Matters through their [MAHB Node profile](#). As their names suggest, both are committed to including human population in the discussions and actions towards a more sustainable world. In short, both are committed to reminding us all that population matters.

*Please note that the two addresses are very similar. Without the hyphen you will end up in England, and the addresses with the hyphen are in the USA.

MAHB-UTS Blogs are a joint venture between the University of Technology Sydney and the Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere. Questions should be directed to joan@mahbonline.org

MAHB Blog: <http://mahb.stanford.edu/blog/why-population-matters/>

ⁱ Finer LB and Zolna MR, [Shifts in intended and unintended pregnancies in the United States, 2001–2008](#), *American Journal of Public Health*, 2014, 104(S1): S44-S48.

ⁱⁱ [Family Planning](#), *United Nations Population Fund*, accessed February 1, 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sedgh G, Singh S, and Hussain R, [Intended and Unintended Pregnancies Worldwide in 2012 and Recent Trends](#), *Studies in Family Planning*, 2014, 45(3): 301-314