

Our Position Paper on:

 **friends of
the earth**
see things differently

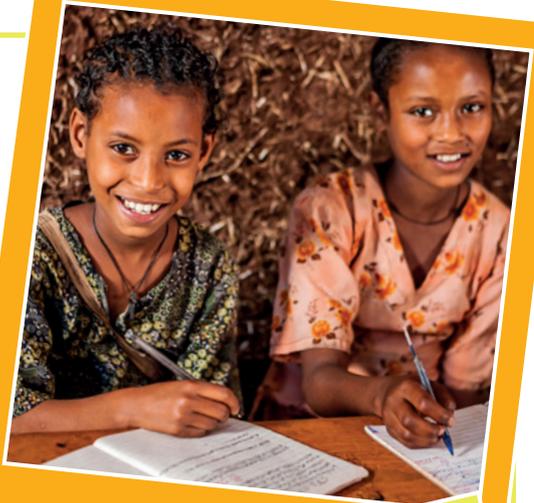


IN A NUTSHELL

The number of people on Earth increases every year. Although population growth is slowing, it still damages natural systems that keep us healthy. Friends of the Earth champions women's rights – they are intrinsically necessary as well as a powerful way to reduce population growth. If girls get a secondary education, decent health care, and have control over their own reproduction, their quality of life improves and they tend to have fewer children. With the right measures in place, the population could begin declining by 2050. This will help our environment and benefit everyone.

THE FACTS

- 1 People worldwide are having fewer children.** The populations of 43 developed countries and 32 developing countries are decreasing or set to decrease in size as fewer babies are being born to replace the numbers of people dying. These countries, which include China, account for almost half the world's population.
- 2 Damaging carbon emissions have risen 15-fold in the past 100 years.** But the world's population increased by only 4 times in the same period. This shows we also need to look at how and why we consume, not just at population growth.
- 3 Data from all over the world shows the health of mothers and their babies has improved.** It also shows that birth rates drop as a direct result of primary and secondary education.
- 4 More than 200 million women in the world want to avoid pregnancy but don't have access to modern contraceptives, according to the United Nations.** Many countries lack family planning services, and some cultures restrict women's choices as part of male-dominated societies, marriages, and religions.



THE PROBLEM

We are severely damaging the natural systems that make our lives possible and enjoyable. This is happening because many countries over-consume, use harmful farming practices, and are over-reliant on cheap fossil fuels. It is also because the world's population is growing.

Many countries with fast-growing populations want support to slow that growth. According to a United Nations report, 37 countries out of 40 say population growth damages them and makes it harder to cope with changes in climate. Six of these countries say slowing population growth and improving family planning should be one of their highest priorities. The report

shows that a growing population puts pressure on the amount of fresh water available, creates a shortage of land, causes deforestation and soil damage, and makes the natural systems we rely on more vulnerable.

In many places worldwide, women are denied sexual and reproductive health rights. Low levels of education, gender inequality, and cultural or religious practices can prevent women from making choices that would enable them to control their family size.

Even in the UK there are still high levels of unwanted pregnancies: 200,000 women each year seek an abortion.

WHAT WE THINK

Friends of the Earth works with the Population and Sustainability Network to develop the solutions we should demand of governments:

■ **Primary and secondary education for all.**

We must overcome barriers to learning so that all children can go to school. Girls should have equal rights to high-quality education – this will improve their lives and choices, and result in smaller families. Tertiary education – college, university and skills-based training – should be made more easily available.

■ **Make consumption more sustainable.**

For people and our planet to flourish, economic systems and social institutions need to change. We must become less dependent on over-consuming resources. We must urgently tackle environmental threats to food supplies: degradation of soil and water, biodiversity loss and climate change. We should prioritise renewable energy over fossil fuels and switch to healthier, lower-meat diets.

■ **Universal access to sexual and reproductive health services.** Contraceptives already

prevent 218 million unintended pregnancies in developing countries every year. We must ensure all people can access health and family planning services that protect human rights. Political, social and financial commitment from all countries can make this happen: increasing annual spending by US\$4 billion globally would give all women access to modern contraceptive methods.

■ **Put an end to gender inequality.**

Leaders should prioritise sexual health, reproductive rights and universal access to health care alongside the empowerment of all girls and women.

■ **Plan for the future.** Welfare services globally must take into account future population size and structure when setting goals and targets, and plan for the impact these will have.

■ **Focus on rights.** Dealing with the population challenge must respect people's rights. We believe coercion to achieve smaller family sizes, including economic coercion, is morally wrong.

KEY REFERENCES

Friends of the Earth (2013), *Global population, consumption and rights*:

www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/population_friends_of_the.pdf

USEFUL LINKS

Friends of the Earth is a member of the *Population and Sustainability Network*:

www.populationandsustainability.org/

To give us feedback please visit: www.foe.co.uk/feedbackcomment.html