

FEWER EMITTERS, LOWER EMISSIONS, LESS COST

REDUCING CARBON EMISSIONS BY INVESTING IN FAMILY PLANNING

Sponsored by the
Optimum Population Trust UK
in collaboration with the London School of
Economics Operational Research

A Cost/Benefit Analysis by Thomas Wire

SUMMARY

A non-existent person has a zero carbon footprint. Comparing the cost of providing non-coercive family planning services and the cost per tonne of reducing carbon emissions by conventional means, this study found that each \$7 spent on meeting unmet need for family planning services between 2010 and 2050 would reduce CO₂ emissions by over a tonne; whereas abating a carbon tonne through low-carbon technologies would cost at least \$32. In other words, **investing a modest proportion of the total cost of stabilising carbon emissions in family planning is four times more effective than investing the same money in conventional solutions.**

This does not take account of additional unquantifiable costs and benefits (PTO) notably the cost of the embodied energy in all technology, and the zero footprint in perpetuity of all the non-existent descendants of a non-existent person.

The full report (published in August 2009) is available on the OPT website at www.optimumpopulation.org. The report contains methodology, assumptions and sources.

“Family planning could bring more benefits to more people at less cost than any other single technology available to the human race.”

UNICEF Report 1992

ESSENTIAL OUTCOME AT COPENHAGEN

It is clearly unrealistic to seek any substantive debate on the issues raised above at the December 2009 Climate Summit. But all Parties already know: that there is an obvious link between total carbon emissions and the number of carbon emitters; and that all environmental problems are exacerbated by ever-rising human numbers. Population is a climate change issue.

It is thus essential to a rational solution of the climate problem that the Summit outcomes contain some reference to population. OPT urges the inclusion of this sentence in the preambular section of the LCA Shared Vision Statement:

“The Parties recognise the fact that all population growth increases the number of both carbon emitters (with bigger footprints in developed than developing countries) and of future climate change victims, thus exacerbating all problems of both mitigation and adaptation; and set up a sub-group to consider the implications, and report in due course.”

Population Growth and Climate Change

Additional Benefits of Family Planning Approach to Reducing Carbon Emissions

The OPT report “*Fewer Emitters, Lower Emissions, Less Cost*”, of which this paper is Annex B, recognises that carbon emissions per person are far greater in OECD countries than in poorer countries, e.g. that one additional Briton has the carbon footprint of 22 additional Malawians; and recommends improved family planning in all countries. Directing more external resources to the improvement of family planning services in the poorer countries, could also achieve a large number of indirect benefits which, even though unquantified, are clearly extremely significant. These include:

- a) Taking a major step towards stabilising human numbers at, and/or reducing them to, a level planet Earth can sustain in the long-term;
- b) Fully mitigating the carbon and other environmental impacts not only of the additional people whose unwanted conception or birth will be prevented, but of all their non-existent descendants in perpetuity;
- c) Doing so with very little, one-off embodied energy, compared with the major embodied energy in building, maintaining and replacing renewable energy technologies in perpetuity;
- d) Reducing the number of future victims of climate change, and the costs of adaptation for them;
- e) Empowering the poor women of the world to take control of their own fertility, as a necessary pre-condition for any wider empowerment;
- f) Alleviating poverty through improvements in health, nutrition and education for women and children;
- g) Reducing the scale of all environmental problems, including: the effects of peak oil; deforestation; freshwater shortages; soil erosion and desertification; the mounting food crisis; declining fisheries; loss of biodiversity; rising waste and pollution; ocean acidification; and depletion of all finite resources - all of which would be easier to solve with fewer people, and ultimately impossible to solve with ever more;
- h) Reducing the pressures contributing to: growing conflicts over land and ever more scarce resources; mass migration; under- or unemployment; urban stress; crime; mental health problems;
- i) Freeing more capital from investment in renewable energy generation to invest in: energy conservation technology; marine and other research; flood defences; climate resilient agriculture; sustainable water resources; social adaptation to lower energy consumption in OECD countries; and all other adaptation programmes.
- j) Encouraging OECD countries, with their far higher per capita emissions, to introduce (clearly non-coercive) population restraint policies too, as an additional cost-effective way of abating their own carbon tonnage in their own long-term interests.

In any case, on a finite planet human numbers must stop growing at some point, either earlier through fewer births (contraception backed by sound policy), or later by more deaths (the natural controls of famine, disease, and predation/war). Indefinite growth is not an option.

Consequential Supplementary Textual Recommendation

Following from the text above, OPT and Sustainable Population Australia also urge the inclusion of the following text in para 12 of the **LCA Section on Enhanced Action on Adaptation and its Means of Implementation**, (in the context of text from Non-Paper No. 8): “[NAPAs]... shall be developed...and approved... in line with the objectives and modalities in Annex I.”

Therefore **insert in Annex I** (“objectives and modalities”):

Either: **“Integrate enhanced access to family planning information and technology in community development and ecological awareness programs wherever high fertility is a barrier to ecological and economic resilience.”**

Or: **“Remove barriers to universal access to fertility control, and promote understanding of the impacts of family size on ecological and economic vulnerability”.**

Endorsements of Inclusion of the Family Planning Approach in Climate Change Negotiations

The following distinguished academics, broadcasters and other supporters have endorsed the approach taken by OPT and SPA, and pressed for broader action:

Sir David Attenborough, *Naturalist, broadcaster and wildlife film-maker*

Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta, *Frank Ramsey professor of economics, Cambridge University*

Professor Paul Ehrlich, *Professor of population studies, Stanford University*

Professor John Guillebaud, *Emeritus professor of reproductive health, University College, London*

Susan Hampshire, *Actor and population campaigner*

Dr. James Lovelock, *Gaia scientist and author*

Professor Aubrey Manning, *President of The Wildlife Trusts; emeritus professor of natural history, Edinburgh University*

Professor Norman Myers, *Visiting Fellow, Green College, Oxford University*

Sara Parkin, *Founder director and trustee, Forum for the Future*

Jonathon Porritt, *Founder director, Forum for the Future; former chairman, UK Sustainable Development Commission*

Professor Chris Rapley, *former director, British Antarctic Survey*

Sir Crispin Tickell, *Chancellor of Kent University, Director of the Policy Foresight Programme at the James Martin Institute, and former UK Permanent Representative on the United Nations Security Council*

WORLD POPULATION: FUTURE UNCERTAIN

NB: Total human environmental impact on Planet Earth = average impact per person x number of people
 Natural resources (oil, water, soil etc) per person = total resources ÷ number of people
 Current growth rates: 80 million extra people per year, 1.5 million per week, 10,000 per hour

