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Sexual and reproductive health

Health education is crucial in helping to lift people out of poverty – it empowers women and men to make informed decisions about their bodies with the aim of preserving good health.

Educating people – particularly women – about their sexual and reproductive health rights is crucial to improving general health and wellbeing and overcoming inequality.

Our sexual and reproductive health programs focus on:

- Family planning and sexual health education
- Safe motherhood and maternal health care

Family planning and contraception

Family planning plays an important role in reproductive and sexual health programs in reducing HIV infections and maternal and infant mortality. It also lessens the number of unwanted pregnancies.

Providing women and men with access to contraceptives and education about their use is a major factor in reducing sexual and maternal health problems.

Educating young people

Oxfam partner, Wan Smolbag Theatre's youth centre in Port Vila, Vanuatu, has seen positive results through its HIV and AIDS workshop. Unemployment, street crimes, drug use, and teen pregnancies are increasing along with the spread of HIV in Vanuatu. The workshop is succeeding in raising the awareness of safe sex practices, the importance of gender equality and HIV and AIDS.

Read more about how this project is building a brighter future for Vanuatuans.

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Population: why it's a dangerous distraction on climate change (and makes us feel uncomfortable)

Trust the military to give it to me straight. Population comes up at virtually every talk I give – on climate change, development or just about anything else. But usually my questioners are a bit more circumspect than the man from the armed forces who recently asked what could be done about 'women popping them out' in poor countries.

People cause climate change, therefore cut the number of people. Right? Not really. A closer look shows that the conventional view is wrong, or at least a gross over-simplification.



Malthus goes to the beach

First, the numbers. The global population is about 6.8 billion and rising, but the rate of growth is slowing and the world population is expected to peak at about 9 billion in 2050. The growth rate is slowing fast, verging on collapse in some countries (South Korea is in a national panic about falling fertility rates and shrinking populations and is likely to look to immigration to fill the gap). The drivers for a far faster demographic transition than that seen in previous centuries in Europe or America are a combination of urbanization, women's education, access to contraception and (one hopes) the spread of notion's of women's rights and control over their own fertility.

So one response is that the 'problem' is self-correcting, and indeed, if the transition gets any faster, the world could be faced by a serious shortage of working age people to look after the rising numbers of elderly. If their arguments were based on logic alone, the population control lobby would probably be advocating compulsory euthanasia rather than birth control, but its preponderance of elderly white male members makes that pretty unlikely.

In what sense is population growth a 'problem' (or 'challenge', as the management-speak people like to say....)? Certainly not on climate change mitigation – as The Guardian's George Monbiot argued in a **great recent polemic**, over the last 30 years, the countries with fastest population growth rates have the slowest emissions growth rate, and vice versa. But that hasn't stopped a bit of blatant opportunism by the **Optimum Population Trust**, launching an **offset scheme** where you can offset your carbon emissions by funding birth control programmes in developing countries. Guys, the problem is consumption, not population. A cull of rich Americans or Australians might have an impact; population growth in Africa is largely irrelevant.

Adapting to climate change is more of an issue. In dozens of developing countries, Oxfam has witnessed the hammering that poor communities are already taking from climate change. Overcrowding in rural areas can increase their vulnerability. But the OPT doesn't seem too bothered about that (wonder why?). Population is undoubtedly one among many contributory factors to hunger and local environmental degradation, although often there is enough food, it's the distribution that goes wrong.

So if population growth is (sometimes) important, what is to be done? Listen to women, stupid.

No coercion is required, just access to education and family planning services (not just contraception, but also proper abortion facilities to reduce the horrendous death toll from backstreet butchers). (And to be fair, the OPT would agree with this).

Amartya Sen famously **showed** that a combination of girl's education and access to contraception prompted a demographic transition in Kerala every bit as fast as China's coercive one child policy.



the best contraceptive

