

POPULATION CONNECTION

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REACHING THE
TIPPING POINT
IN THE SAHEL





President's Note

The United States spans a continent rich in natural resources. The land-locked African Sahelian nation of Chad ranks near the very bottom of global lists in terms of resources and prosperity. These two vastly different nations have one thing in common: Both are overpopulated.

The United Nations World Food Programme reports that Chad “has one of the highest levels of hunger in the world” and that “around 40 percent of children aged under five suffer stunting.” This malnutrition results from overpopulation in a land where women average 5.6 children and where only about 4 percent of the land is arable.

Overpopulation in the U.S. is driving sky-high levels of carbon emissions. Our CO₂ emissions in just two days are greater than all such emissions in Chad over the past 60 years. The climate crisis is destroying global biodiversity and placing hundreds of millions of people at mortal risk in places like Chad. More than 20,000 scientists from nearly 200 countries have stated that “planet Earth is facing a climate emergency” and that we are “failing to adequately limit population growth.”

Population Connection’s own mission statement begins with the words “Overpopulation threatens.” Not everyone agrees. Calling current talk about overpopulation “nonsense,” Johns Hopkins University Professor Erle Ellis says, “We transform ecosystems to sustain ourselves.” That’s hardly a compelling argument when we’re adding some 80 million people each year to our overheated planet.

The overpopulation debate has proceeded for several hundred years with the likes of Thomas Malthus and our co-founder Paul Ehrlich making our case while being opposed by David Ricardo and Julian Simon. Mostly, we’ve heard from those in the Global North. It’s time we also pay attention to voices from the Global South, where the vast majority of population growth is taking place.

Chad’s Minister of Public Health, Moussa Khadam, points out that “Chad has very high illiteracy and is already overpopulated in the center and the south. We need better tools for family planning and greater awareness to tackle traditions that are centuries old.” Khadam’s grandfather had 64 children. Khadam decided to stop at two.

African women leaders in key public health posts from Egypt to Ghana to Burundi to Namibia have also raised the alarm about overpopulation. And Malawi’s Vice President, Dr. Saulos Chilima, warned his fellow citizens that “unbridled overpopulation and environmental degradation are threatening our communities.”

Let’s all heed these warnings from the continent where human history began about the threats posed by overpopulation. We can help by adding our voices—and by getting our own house in order.

John Seager
john@popconnect.org



Healthy Human Habits That Help the Environment

Former Population Connection board chair and University of California San Francisco professor emeritus J. Joseph Speidel MD, MPH has recently published *The Building Blocks of Health: How to Optimize Wellness With a Lifestyle Checklist*. Dr. Speidel provides an evidence-based strategy for healthy behavior to reverse the lifestyle-related damage that leads to illness and early death. The book explains why eating a healthy plant-based diet will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, helping to mitigate further climate changes.

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By Will Brown



Cover Image: Hawa, a Wodaabi member of the Sabgari Clan, pauses for a portrait among other family members at their camp in Bermo, Niger, on June 24, 2019. The Wodaabe People, a sub-group of the Fulani, are nomadic cattle herders and traders in the wider Sahel region. Their migrations stretch from southern Niger through northern Nigeria, northeastern Cameroon, southwestern Chad, and the western region of the Central African Republic. Higher temperatures, shifting winds and moisture levels that alter rainfall patterns, sandstorms, torrential rain—all can change the quality or even the location of pasture on which migrating herders depend. (Marco Longari/AFP via Getty Images)

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Editor's Note

Just after finishing graduate school, and before looking for a job in my chosen field, I seized the life-changing opportunity to spend three months in Senegal, the westernmost country in the African Sahel region. I went with my husband, Alex, and a couple, Laura and John, who had become some of our closest friends during the time that Laura and I attended the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Having both just gotten our masters degrees in Population and Development, we felt that it was important that we actually spend some time living and interning in a developing country—the decision to choose a francophone one was ambitious and probably ill advised, given that none of us were even close to fluent in French. (Oh, the enviable optimism of youth.)

We started out in a homestay about an hour north of the capital city of Dakar, attending daily French classes with a local eccentric on his rooftop and getting to know our neighborhood and playing with the children who screamed “toubab” (white person) every time they spotted us. We visited the beaches where the fishermen came ashore with their daily hauls, and where waiting women collected their catches to sell at the nearby markets. We attended a World Cup qualifier game in a stadium peppered with young police carrying machine guns. We sat around late into the night with our hosts’ neighbors, eating *thiéboudienne* (the national dish, which consists of fish, rice, and vegetables) with our hands out of the same large bowl, laughing about our cultural differences and trying to convince them that we were being truthful when we said we were full.

After leaving our homestay to live in an apartment in Dakar on our own for a couple weeks, we headed eight hours east to the inland town of Tambacounda, where Laura and I had secured internships with the NGO Africare. Our assignment was to visit remote villages in the region and talk with women about their health histories and barriers to access to reproductive health care, including family planning. Africare was considering

setting up new health posts and wanted to make sure there was interest among these very rural communities in having a local clinic before getting to work on the process of creating one. In order to communicate with the women, Laura and I spoke in flawed French to a translator who spoke to the women in whichever of the three regional languages they spoke. The stories of loss we heard from these women were devastating. Many of them had lost babies and children to illness—some had lost more than one. And all of the women we talked with knew women who had died during pregnancy or childbirth or in the period shortly after. And yet, when we asked the women whether they would use contraception if they had a new health post in their village, it seemed as though many of them weren’t even sure what contraception was or how it could possibly prevent pregnancy. To be fair, this was 15 years ago, and I’m hoping that outreach to remote areas has improved since then.

As the Sahel region grapples with extremely high fertility and population growth, drought and other consequences of climate change, and entrenched poverty, the United States can (and should) help by scaling up its foreign assistance. The Biden administration is releasing its FY22 budget soon, but a preview of the numbers shows that the global health request is going to be \$800 million higher than our current spending level. We hope that much of that increase will be directed toward international family planning programs, which the U.S. is underfunding by more than \$1 billion, according to the commitment we made at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. For the sake of women and girls in Senegal, in the entire Sahel region, and in all low- and lower-middle-income countries, it’s time that we make good on our pledge and provide the assistance needed to improve health and well-being and tackle global population challenges.

Marian Starkey
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Photo: John, Laura, me, and Alex in December 2005 in a remote village a couple hours from Tambacounda, Senegal

Letters to the Editor

It is wonderful work you do to help the planet as much as possible from overpopulation. You are one of only a few organizations that will talk about the obvious—the connection between our sad environment and too many people. I would like to see an article directed to men about their responsibilities. You talk about all the women that you are helping with birth control, abortions, etc., but you should also mention sterilization for men.

Bonnie Scott

Thank you for all the critical work you do. I always try to read *Population Connection* cover-to-cover because it gives me detailed insights into what's happening on the population front worldwide. I find myself, again and again, in 100 percent agreement with everything I read in *Population Connection*, and I appreciate the breadth and depth that I gain from reading it each quarter.

Jaime Hunter

Many of us in the environmental movement are closet supporters of Population Connection simply to avoid conflict with less progressive friends, neighbors, and acquaintances. That said, many of us in the environmental movement are also academicians and we like to know the real science and the real data behind stories we read in your exceptional magazine. Consequently, I would like to see scientific citations for many of the articles presented in *Population Connection*.

Norman T. Baker, PhD

Thank you for featuring last fall's unprecedented California wildfires [in the March issue]. Population Connection has rightfully attributed the worst fires in our history to a perfect storm of overpopulation, climate chaos, and destructive public policies serving influential, wealthy individuals and industries. Resistance to science-based solutions is increasing in tandem with these extraordinary, multiple crises.



Here in Humboldt County, California, our once-pristine rivers and tributaries are clouded with turbidity, choked in algae, and polluted by fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, and mining debris. The otters that once patrolled local streams vanished decades ago with the collapse of the biodiversity they fed upon, victims of habitat loss and diminishing fresh, clean water due to human activity. All but one of our region's six large rivers are officially designated "impaired."

The prerequisite for all historic social advancements and humane, science-based public policies begins with ubiquitous demands for change.

George Clark

I am concerned for two reasons about what Joanne Harrington wrote in her March letter to the editor. The first concern is that the author and friends have had difficulty finding physicians to do tubal ligations. The second is that, unfortunately, people do change their minds, and Ms. Harrington doesn't seem to take that into account.

I practiced obstetrics and gynecology in the same rural community for 40 years. Before performing tubal ligations, I discussed the "terrible Ds"—divorce, death of the partner, and death of a child—to try to reduce the possibility of regret. The youngest woman I sterilized was 18. She had two children, cervical precancer, and menstrual problems and chose hysterectomy as her treatment. I also put tubes back together for women who regretted their surgery. Part of my reason for doing fertility surgery was that a woman might be more likely to have a tubal ligation if she knew that there was a possibility of putting her tubes back together in the future. My vision of my role as OB-GYN was that I was to serve the needs and desires of women when possible, and to not be judgmental.

Richard Grossman

FAMILY PLANNING AND GIRLS' EDUCATION IN THE SAHEL

The G-5 Sahel countries'* population is expected to more than double –from 85 million to nearly 200 million people– by 2050.

This is a conservative estimate which assumes a steeper decline in fertility than these countries experienced in recent decades.

**Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad*

Birth rates in the Sahel are among the world's highest: an average of 5.7 children over a woman's lifetime.



1 in 4 women surveyed in the Sahel would like to have fewer children or space out births but

lack modern contraceptives.



The median age of marriage is around 16

in Niger, Chad, and Mali. About

40% of women give birth before age 18.



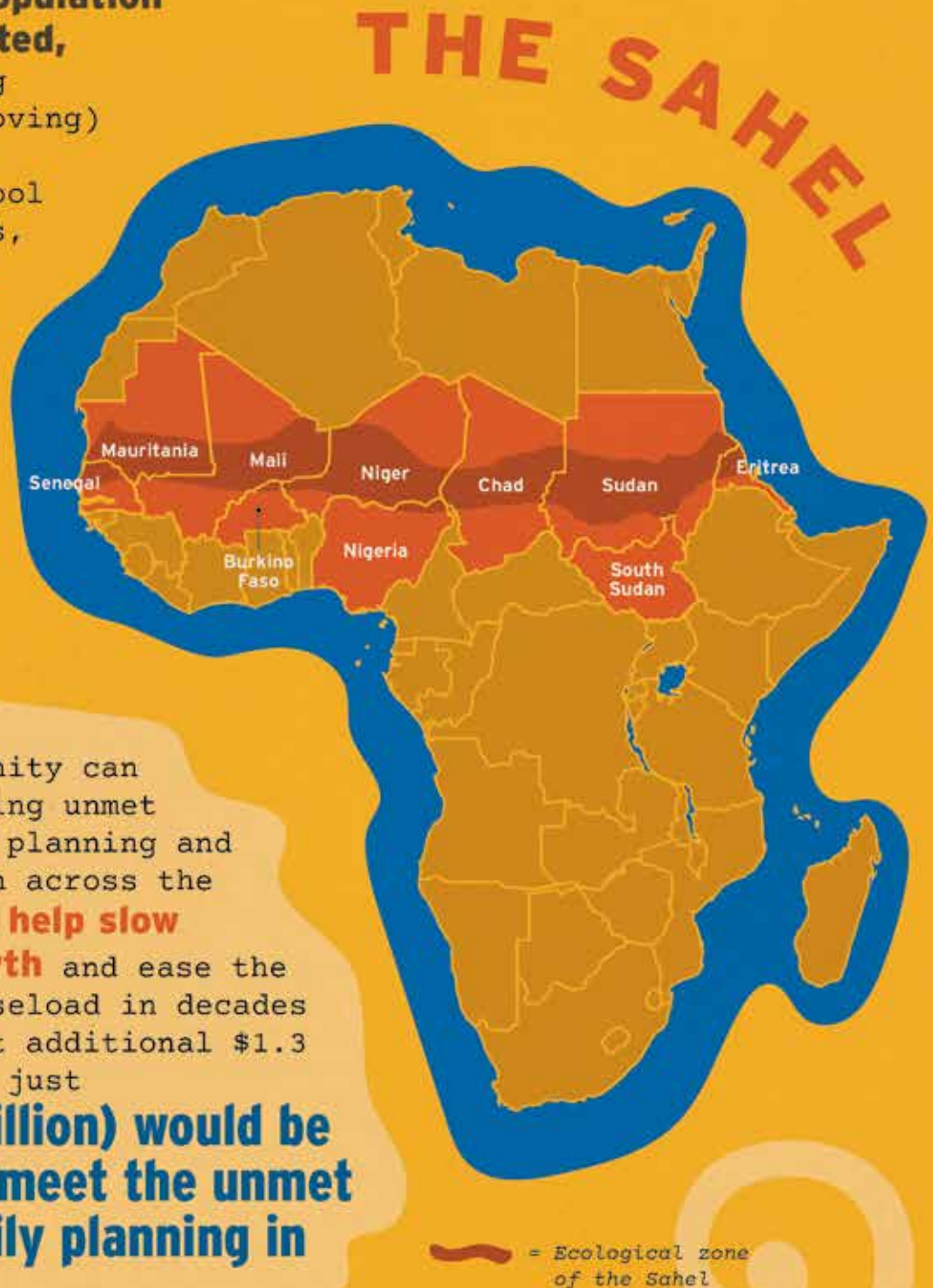
Only 3–6 girls out of every 10 complete primary school

in Mali, Chad, and Niger. Secondary school completion is very low regionwide:

3 of the 5 countries have **completion rates below 30%.**

If the Sahel's population grows as projected, just maintaining (let alone improving) its current per capita GDP, school enrollment rates, and health care access would require 11% annual GDP growth.

For [an additional] **\$1.3 billion annually**, the donor community can meet the remaining unmet need for family planning and girls' education across the Sahel. This **will help slow population growth** and ease the humanitarian caseload in decades to come. Of that additional \$1.3 billion needed, just **8% (\$107 million) would be sufficient to meet the unmet need for family planning in the region.**





IN THE NEWS

By Stacie Murphy, Director of Congressional Relations

UN Environment Programme Issues Blueprint for Addressing Environmental Crises

A new report issued by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Making Peace With Nature*, offers a science-based road map for how to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals. It points out that environmental challenges are undermining progress in meeting development goals and that the problem will only become worse if humanity does not radically alter its relationship with nature. It emphasizes that the coming decade is a critical period for determining our long-term environmental trajectory and that environmental preservation and human well-being must be addressed jointly if we are to have any chance at a sustainable future.

United Kingdom Cuts Aid to UNFPA by 85 Percent

In an astounding move described as “devastating” by one official, the United Kingdom has announced that it plans to decrease its funding for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) by 85 percent. Instead of the £154 million (USD \$215 million) originally promised for the purchase of contraceptive supplies, the organization will receive only £23 million (\$32 million). Core funding will be cut from £20 million (\$28 million) to £8 million (\$11 million).

Even more shockingly, these cuts are being made despite the fact that signed agreements for the higher amounts are already in place—a practically unheard-of breach of faith on the part of a donor government. The cuts come as the UK commits to lowering its overall international development assistance budget to 0.5 percent of gross national income, down from 0.7 percent.

Black Maternal Health “Mominibus” Bill Reintroduced

A package of bills aimed at reducing Black maternal deaths has been reintroduced in the U.S. House and Senate. The so-called “Mominibus” (a play on the word “omnibus,” which describes a group of bills treated as a single measure) includes 12 bills intended to address multiple facets of the Black maternal health crisis in the U.S., where Black people have a three-to-four-times higher risk of death from pregnancy, birth, or postpartum complications than their white counterparts.

While the prior version of the Mominibus contained nine bills, the new version adds measures intended to help combat the heightened COVID-19 toll among Black people as well as a new initiative highlighting the association between pollution and pre-term birth. The bill is led in the House by Lauren Underwood (D-IL) and Alma Adams (D-NC) and in the Senate by Cory Booker (D-NJ).

Texas Blocks Planned Parenthood From Medicaid Program

On March 10, a Texas judge ruled that the state could proceed with its plan to ban Planned Parenthood from participating in the state’s Medicaid program. The effort, which began in 2016, was delayed by lawsuits in federal courts until early 2020, when the notoriously conservative 5th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of Texas. Planned Parenthood then unsuccessfully attempted further litigation at the state level, arguing that Texas had not properly followed notification procedures.

Texas has one of the lowest income thresholds in the country for Medicaid eligibility. A single parent with two children would have to make no more than \$230 per month to qualify. A spokesperson for Planned Parenthood South Texas said that Medicaid recipients accounted for about 10 percent of patients in the area.

COVID-19 Has Disrupted Global Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Efforts on Multiple Fronts

The COVID-19 pandemic has stalled advancement on a whole array of human rights and development goals, and there is evidence that it may actually reverse progress in some instances. In a joint statement, the executive directors of

UNICEF and UNFPA warned that there may be an additional 2 million cases of female genital mutilation (FGM) over the coming decade as the pandemic has closed schools and disrupted programs aimed at preventing the practice, which has no health benefits and frequently leads to lifelong complications.

In a separate analysis, UNICEF found that the same disruptions may lead to up to 10 million additional girls at risk of child marriage over the same period. Economic stress and parental deaths are also cited as risk factors that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Girls who marry as children face both immediate and long-term consequences. They are more likely to end schooling, face domestic violence, and have an increased probability of early and unplanned pregnancy, both of which increase the likelihood of complications and death.

In both cases, only sustained and committed action by governments and other stakeholders can avert these potential outcomes.

State of the States: Roundup of New U.S. Abortion Bills and Laws

Arizona

In late April, Gov. Doug Ducey (R) signed a bill into law that bans abortion in cases where the fetus has a survivable genetic defect. Any doctor who knowingly performs such an abortion could be charged with a felony. The bill also

contains a fetal personhood provision and a requirement that fetal remains be buried or cremated, forbids state universities from offering abortion, and bans mail delivery of abortion medication. Court challenges are inevitable but had not been filed at the time of the print deadline for this issue.

Arkansas

In March, Gov. Asa Hutchinson (R) signed a bill that would ban abortion except to save the life of the pregnant person. The bill is explicitly intended to give the Supreme Court an opportunity to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. It would not take effect until later in the summer but is expected to be blocked by the courts well before then.

Montana

In late April, Gov. Greg Gianforte (R) signed a bill that bans abortion in the state after 20 weeks' gestation, requires doctors to offer patients an opportunity to view an ultrasound before the procedure, and places multiple restrictions on the use of medication abortion, including requiring that the medication be administered in person rather than via telehealth. No information about potential lawsuits was available at the time of our deadline.

South Carolina

A new state law banning abortions once a fetal heartbeat can be detected—usually around six weeks into a pregnancy—was blocked by a federal judge who said that

the case “does not present a close call. ... In fact, based on the law, the Court is unable to fathom how another court could decide this issue differently than how this Court has decided it.” The law is yet another attempt to create an opportunity for the Supreme Court to overturn *Roe*.

South Dakota

In March, Gov. Kristi Noem (R) signed a law banning abortion in cases where genetic testing indicates that the fetus may have Down syndrome. Providers who are aware of the diagnosis but perform an abortion anyway may be charged with a felony.

Tennessee

A pair of Tennessee legislators have introduced a bill that would give men the right to veto a partner's abortion decision and does not contain any exception for cases of rape or incest. The legislation is not expected to advance. Tennessee is also one of a number of states to have passed a near-total abortion ban in the last year. That law has been blocked by a federal court, but litigation is ongoing.

The online version of this article includes links to sources, in case you'd like to read more than just these short blurbs. Find it on our website at popconnect.org/article/in-the-news-june-2021/

EARTH DAY 2021

Population Connection members and supporters participated in our second **all-virtual Earth Day** in April, joining us for a month-long “Passport Series” of expert voices from around the world and a screening of the uplifting documentary *2040*. In total, **over 450 members and supporters** joined us for at least one virtual Earth Day event!



Dr. Michelle Dubón

Dr. Michelle Dubón, Medical Director of WINGS, spoke at length about WINGS’ provision of family planning services to Guatemala’s rural and marginalized people.



Riju Dhakal

Riju Dhakal and Sajja Singh of YUWA, a youth-led organization based in Nepal, discussed YUWA’s work throughout Nepal, which is centered around sexual and reproductive health and rights activism.



Sajja Singh

POPULATION CONNECTION PAGE TURNERS BOOK CLUB

We hosted the second meeting of our Population Connection Page Turners book club in early May. Several staff members led a discussion of Elizabeth Kolbert's newest book, *Under a White Sky: The Nature of the Future*.

The next book club meeting will take place in July—you can find more information, and sign up to join us, at popconnect.org/book-club.



Alisha Graves



Lucie Ouedraogo

Alisha Graves, Executive Director and Founder of OASIS, and Lucie Ouedraogo, former Sahel Leadership Program Fellow at OASIS, presented on how family planning, population, and environmental issues intertwine in the Sahel region in Africa.



2040

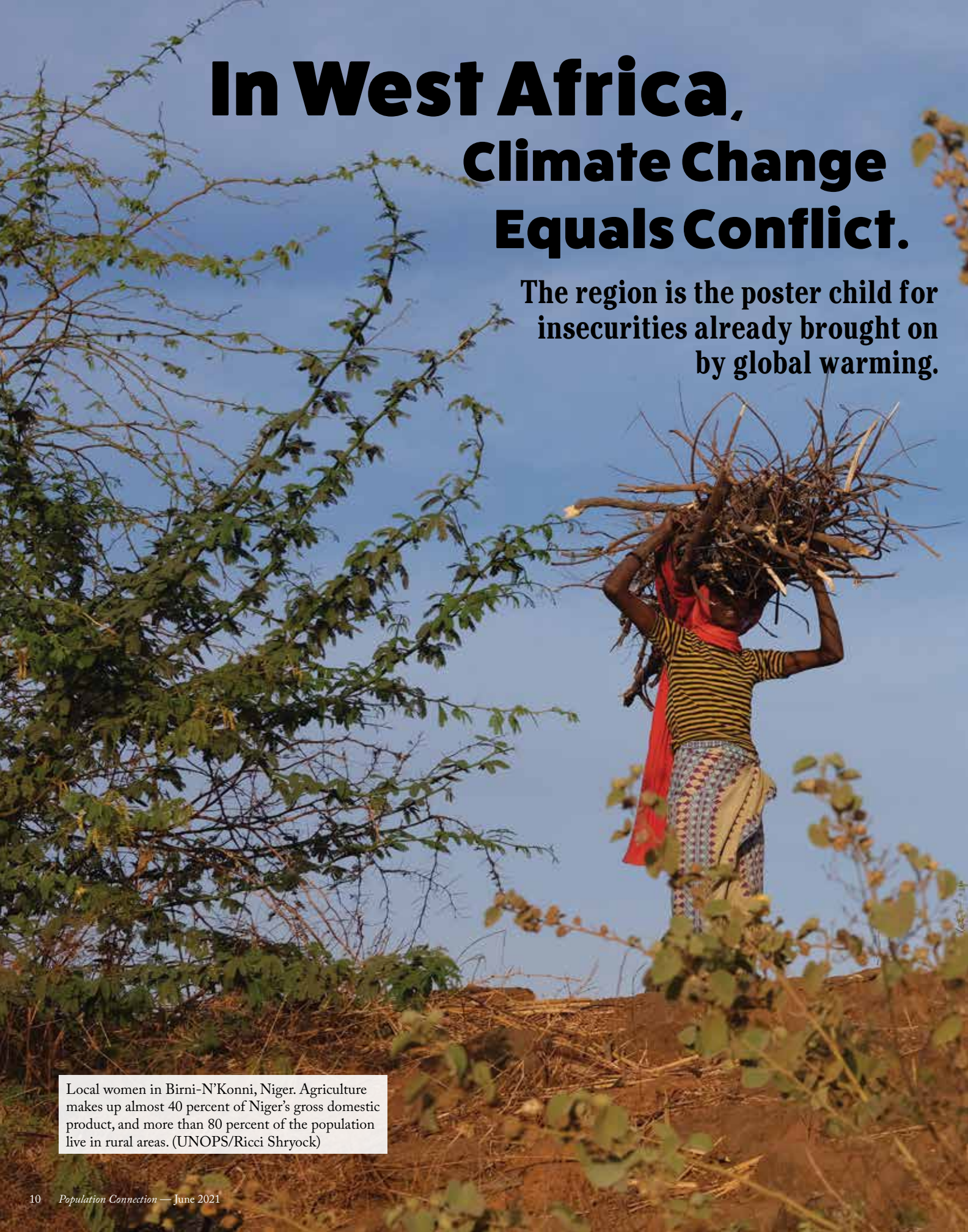
Our series concluded with a screening and discussion of *2040*—a hopeful new film that focuses on some of the most innovative and effective solutions to climate change, including the empowerment of women and girls.

If you missed any of these presentations, they're available to view on our website at popconnect.org/earthday.

We encourage you to contact us at engage@popconnect.org with questions on how to join any of our events, as well as to offer your own ideas for future events. We love hearing from you!

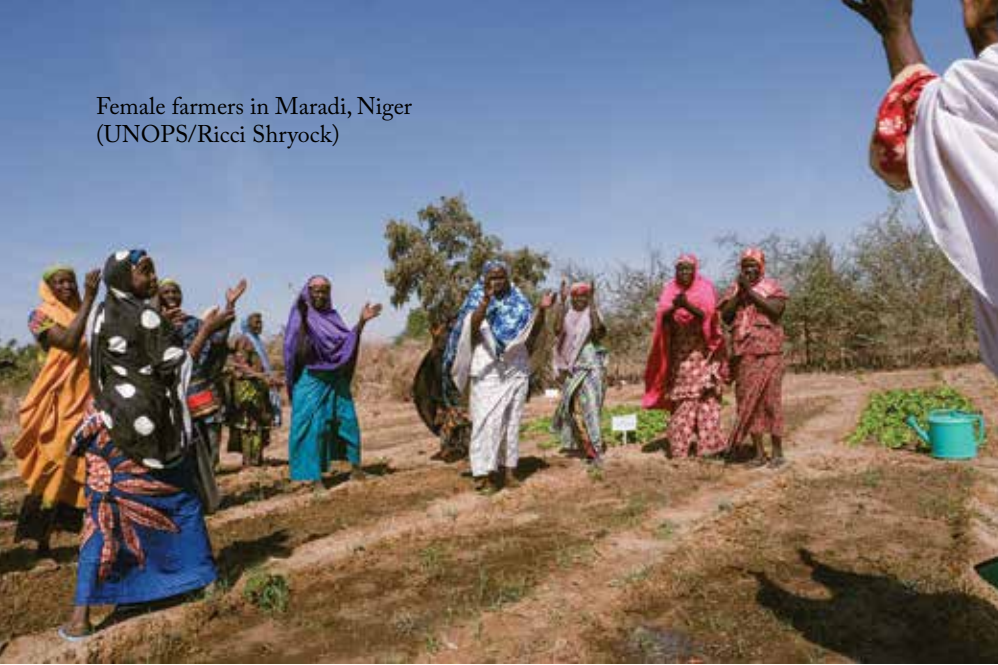
In West Africa, Climate Change Equals Conflict.

The region is the poster child for
insecurities already brought on
by global warming.



Local women in Birni-N'Konni, Niger. Agriculture makes up almost 40 percent of Niger's gross domestic product, and more than 80 percent of the population live in rural areas. (UNOPS/Ricci Shryock)





By Robert Muggah | Originally published by Foreign Policy on February 18, 2021

One of the many injustices of climate change is it hits the world's poorest countries hardest. African nations, many of which register the highest levels of poverty and emit the least carbon dioxide, are already being ravaged by global warming. The reasons for this are straightforward: With roughly 60 percent of the sub-Saharan population depending on agriculture to survive, food insecurity is intensified by disruptions to rain cycles, planting seasons, and harvests. Making matters worse, new forecasts predict that rising sea levels will threaten vulnerable coastal communities due to flooding and erosion, salinizing arable land, and disrupting inland and coastal fisheries. As people migrate and tensions over diminishing resources escalate, the threats of social unrest and organized violence are already apparent.

West Africa is the poster child for insecurities associated with global warming, as the Igarapé Institute described in a

recent report. Globally, the period from 2011 to 2020 was the hottest decade ever recorded. West Africa's Sahel—the vast zone of semi-arid grasslands that lies south of the Sahara Desert—was affected more than most regions, with temperatures rising 1.5 times the international average. Scenarios developed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change suggest that temperatures could climb up to 6 degrees Celsius by the end of the century. Across the region's 17 countries, intensifying heat is contributing to more prolonged droughts and rainfall, which in turn affects land-use patterns for farmers, herders, and their livestock. The World Bank believes a situation of deteriorating environmental conditions and weak governance could tip some fragile countries into outright conflict. Many of the states categorized by the World Bank as fragile are also ranked among those most vulnerable to climate change, whether in terms of exposure to extreme weather events or the extent of population affected.

In countries already impacted by searing inequalities, fast-growing and youthful populations, overreliance on agriculture, serious corruption, and weak governance, the risks of climate change triggering the onset, escalation, and resurgence of armed conflict are especially high.



Rabi, a cattle breeder from Maradi, Niger, says, “Sometimes, we must sacrifice, not eating in order to be able to buy food for the cows because we don’t have enough money and since there is not enough pasture.” (UNOPS/Ricci Shryock)

Social scientists describe climate change as a “threat multiplier” because of how it exacerbates the risk factors that already give rise to instability. In countries already impacted by searing inequalities, fast-growing and youthful populations, overreliance on agriculture, serious corruption, and weak governance, the risks of climate change triggering the onset, escalation, and resurgence of armed conflict are especially high. While intensely debated by climate scientists, the complex relationships among rising temperatures, ecosystem resilience, seasonal rainfall variability, changes to arable

land, shifting livestock grazing, and violence are increasingly hard to ignore.

West Africa’s coastal populations face especially worrying risks from climate change. Demographers predict that as many as 85 million people could inhabit the region’s coastal cities by 2050. The World Bank likewise estimates that around 6,500 square kilometers of the region’s coastal areas could be severely degraded by rising sea levels. The social and economic costs are mounting. Storm surges and rain-triggered floods are damaging cities, setting back development, and generating the spread of

disease that has killed thousands and displaced millions in Benin, Ivory Coast, Senegal, and Togo. The relocation of populations is generating pressure on cities and villages with limited capacities to service new arrivals. The economic burden of environmental degradation in these four countries totaled \$3.8 billion, or 5.3 percent of their combined GDP, in 2017 alone.

Rising seas and a greater likelihood of storm surges are affecting food production for vulnerable coastal populations. Changes in water temperature and erosion are triggering the migration

Meri Mahaman is the head of a female farmers union in El Kolta, Maradi Region, Niger, where food shortages mean residents often have to travel to neighboring towns to buy vital supplies. This means more time spent traveling to get food and less focus on developing local agriculture. "If people here stop buying food elsewhere, it will help our [local] economy and food will be in abundance," explains Meri. (UNOPS/Ricci Shryock)





West Africa's coastal populations face especially worrying risks from climate change. Demographers predict that as many as 85 million people could inhabit the region's coastal cities by 2050.

of fish stocks while salinization is contaminating arable land and ground water reserves. Due to a combination of climate impacts and severe overfishing—including from Chinese and European trawlers—the maximum catch potential for fish could decline by 30 percent or more in the Gulf of Guinea, a region where around 4.8 million people rely on fishing to sustain their livelihoods. Senegalese fishermen are increasingly crossing the border to Mauritania to fish, which has led to violent exchanges with the Mauritanian coast guard. Violent spats over fishing grounds are not new, but as sea levels rise, such altercations will multiply, provoking further conflict.

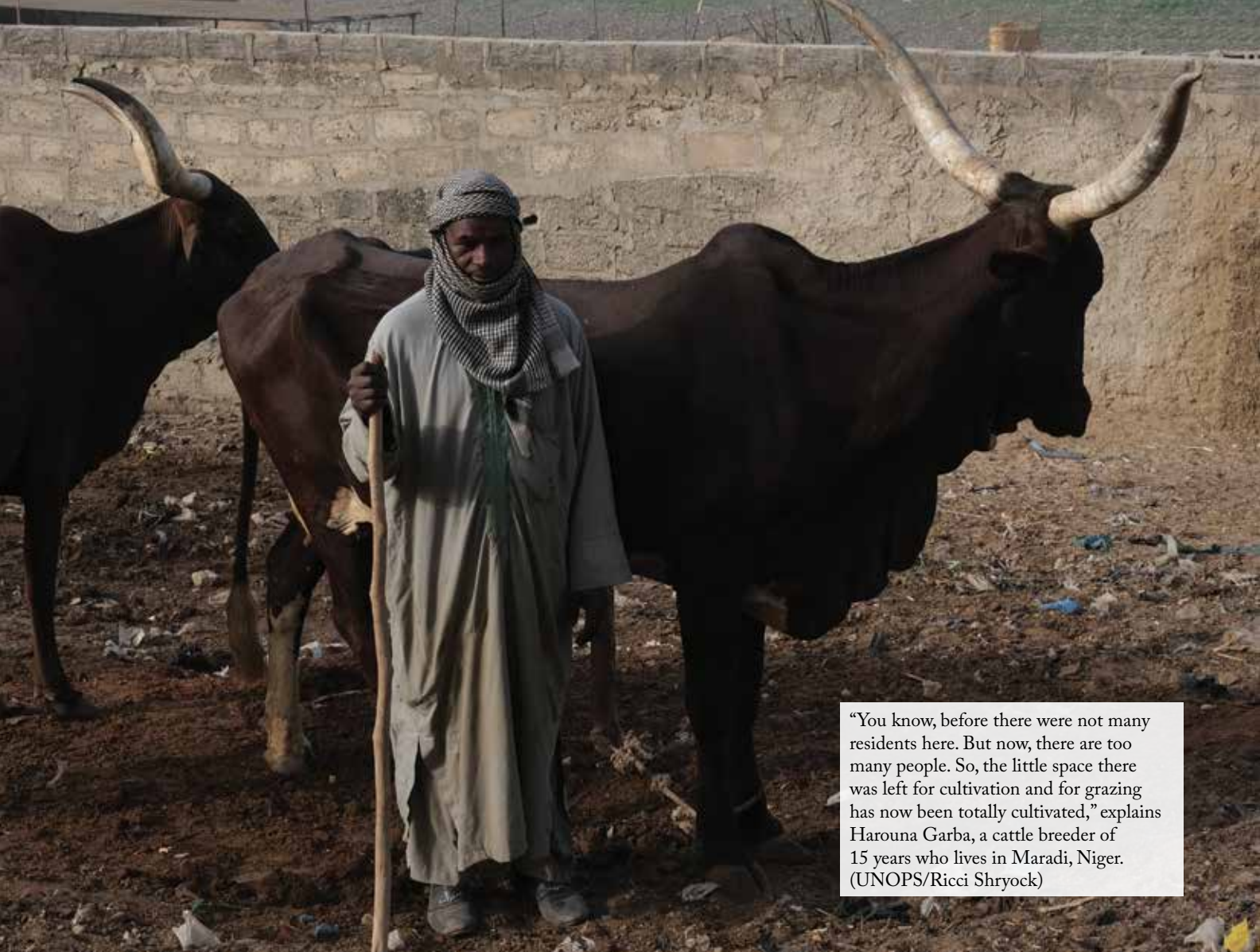
Climate change is also accelerating migration and displacement in West Africa, especially in the Sahel. Today, roughly 25 million Sahelian herders of cattle, sheep, goats, and other livestock travel south with their animals during the dry season and then back north during the wet season. Prolonged dry seasons, shortened rainy seasons, and less regular rainfall are generating new uncertainties for pastoralists, requiring new herd management methods and undermining delicate ecosystems. Competition over grazing land, reduced access to water, and the erosion of customary dispute resolution mechanisms are accelerating retaliatory cycles of violence.

Flash points include the border between Burkina Faso and Mali, as well as Nigeria's so-called Middle Belt region. Studies by early warning organizations such as the International Crisis Group and Search For Common Ground, as well as regional bodies such as the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, underline how multifaceted these conflicts are. There are frequent cases of military, militia, and police clashing with pastoralists who are forced to graze their

livestock in contested terrain. Disputes often turn violent due to competition for water and pastoralists overusing farmers' fields or crops. Extremist networks are taking advantage of the violent competition between farmers and pastoralists to advance their causes. These tensions flare up when local governance and traditional customs for resolving disputes fail. Many times, political and economic elites are also involved in exacerbating violent conflict.

Notwithstanding the fiendishly complex challenges ahead, a wide range of governments and organizations are experimenting with ways to alleviate these threats, including through geoengineering. The most ambitious project is the Great Green Wall, a \$14 billion initiative spanning 21 countries. The wall was initiated in 2007 to restore 247 million acres of degraded land by planting trees and bushes, which will have the added effect of sequestering some 275 million tons of carbon. Supported by the African Union and funded by the European Union, United Nations, and World Bank, the wall is expected to be completed by 2030. Additionally, in 2019, the African Development Bank launched a \$1.3 billion investment in the Sahel Commission's investment plan and a \$20 million solar energy initiative. The entire West African region aims to increase the share of renewable energy in the electricity supply from 35 to 48 percent by 2030.

Progress on the Great Green Wall, however, is slower than expected. Nigeria and Senegal, for example, have reforested thousands of acres of land, though similar efforts in Burkina Faso and Mali have been hampered by extremist violence. Heavy-handed interventions to quell tensions between farmers and pastoralists, as well as government operations



“You know, before there were not many residents here. But now, there are too many people. So, the little space there was left for cultivation and for grazing has now been totally cultivated,” explains Harouna Garba, a cattle breeder of 15 years who lives in Maradi, Niger. (UNOPS/Ricci Shryock)

to combat extremist violence such as Nigeria’s Operation Cat Race and Operation Whirl Stroke, have yielded mixed results. Likewise, the Nigerian government’s introduction of so-called cattle colonies to provide protection and services for pastoralists has struggled to deliver positive outcomes. Growing numbers of international and national agencies are advocating for environmental peace building to encourage competitors to tackle shared environmental threats, but these proposals have yet to gain traction.

More promising are multilateral efforts to address long-festering environmental issues that could worsen under climate change, including the Lake Chad Basin Commission first established in 1964. In recent years, the commission has mediated water-related tensions among Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria—and helped set the stage for stabilization strategies that include channeling humanitarian and development assistance, addressing unsustainable farming practices, and introducing drought-resistant crops. Such transnational coalitions, along with the scaling-up of promising national

and local efforts to build environmental, economic, and social resilience, will be critical for addressing the interlocking crises that will become increasingly likely as climate change continues. The global community would do well to step up its involvement because these issues will dominate its agenda sooner than it thinks.

Robert Muggah is a principal at the SecDev Group, a co-founder of the Igarapé Institute, and the author, with Ian Goldin, of Terra Incognita: 100 Maps to Survive the Next 100 Years.



On the Cusp of Famine

“Nowhere scares me more than the Sahel ... we are close to a tipping point”

Caught between jihadists and climate change, the region faces an almighty humanitarian crisis. Will Brown reports from Burkina Faso. Pictures by Simon Townsley. Originally published by the Telegraph.

The malnutrition ward is so packed that staff are using broken incubators to block the corridors and stop the ward becoming completely overwhelmed by mothers and their starving children.

Rasmata Cisse, a tiny five-year-old, is standing in the corridor, her legs so emaciated they look like they could snap at any moment.

The wards around her in Kaya central hospital in northern Burkina Faso are full of children who are lying three to a bed.

One boy is curled up, his skin covered in sores and infections from the hunger, moaning in pain. Another lies shivering, eyes closed, blood leaking out of his ear from an unknown infection.

The women sitting on the floor next to their starved children say they feel helpless. Their stories vary, but fundamentally they are the same: Masked gunmen came to their villages and drove them away from their crops and animals. Now they have nothing to eat.

“We fled the men with guns in the village. Now we are not eating enough. I have no milk left in my breasts to feed my son,” says Ousseni.



Above: Broken incubators block the hospital corridors. **Below:** Ousseni Diallo has been unable to feed her child since she stopped producing breast milk. **Opposite:** Dr. Dabiré Germain





Dr. Dabiré Germain, the hospital's head pediatrician, looks exhausted—his ward is running at 130 percent capacity, and he is short of almost everything, including doctors.

"The health centers in many villages have been closed because of the fighting. So a lot more people are coming here to the central hospital," says Dr. Germain. "I just don't understand. The population is so impoverished. Why are they being attacked?"

Across the vast arid Sahel region, south of the Sahara Desert, a fierce war with jihadists allied to Al Qaeda and Islamic State has displaced millions of people.

The flood of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) are now beginning to overwhelm the impoverished nations

of the Sahel which are already struggling with a lack of jobs for their booming populations, climate change, and cyclical bouts of mass hunger.

These problems have combined to create one of the most complex and rapidly expanding humanitarian crises on earth, a crisis that is only getting worse.

In the landlocked nations of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger—which have a combined population equal to the UK—some 7.2 million children need humanitarian assistance, according to UNICEF.

Aid workers struggle to get access to many parts of the region, fearing either improvised explosive devices or random attacks. Humanitarians now say they are struggling to see a solution amid

The flood of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) are now beginning to overwhelm the impoverished nations of the Sahel, which are already struggling with a lack of jobs for their booming populations, climate change, and cyclical bouts of mass hunger.

The now abandoned half-built mansion of Blaise Compaoré, Burkina Faso's former president, on the road between Kaya and Ouagadougou

Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger, and northeast Nigeria are at “a true epicenter of conflict and insecurity, weak governance, chronic underdevelopment and poverty, demographic pressures, and climate change.”



ever-escalating violence from an array of armed groups.

Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger, and northeast Nigeria are at “a true epicenter of conflict and insecurity, weak governance, chronic underdevelopment and poverty, demographic pressures, and climate change,” Mark Lowcock, [the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator], said in October.

“Nowhere scares me more than the Sahel,” Mr. Lowcock added. The region “is very close to a tipping point—and so, by extension, are its African neighbors, Europe, and the world.”

“There are few regions in the world that worry us as much as the Sahel, because of this lethal cocktail of climate change and endless, escalating conflicts and a

large generation of youngsters who have no hope of a better life,” Jan Egeland, the Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, told the *Telegraph*.

Hunger is perhaps the most pressing issue for the displaced masses. Farming in the Sahel is almost completely done by hand by smallholder subsistence farmers. Long before the jihadists came, many of these farmers were facing inconsistent rains, depleted soils, and desertification. An estimated 80 percent of the region's farmland is already degraded, according to the UN.

At the same time, a growing conflict between herders and farmers over arable land has been exploited by jihadists. This has created a dizzyingly complex communitarian layer to the war against the extremists. As government forces have retreated out of rural areas, ethnic self-defense militias, traffickers, and



extremists have sprung up to fill the void, meaning many villagers are now simply too scared to return to their fields for harvest.

The human debris of the war is all around cities like Kaya. The dusty city was home to around 80,000 people in 2012. But since 2016, tens of thousands of people seeking a modicum of safety have walked into the city, and its population has ballooned.

Awa Sawadogo, a woman in her mid-30s, sits on a plastic chair in a small aid distribution center in Kaya, breastfeeding a baby who is not hers. The mother is a relative who has not been able to produce milk since her family fled their home earlier this year, she explains, stroking the child's head.

Ms. Sawadogo comes from a village near the town of Arbinda in Burkina Faso's

Soum Province. The northern region, which borders Mali, has seen heavy fighting with jihadists allied to the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. She says the village was attacked twice by around 40 to 60 masked men on motorbikes, who shot at everyone they saw. "They killed many, many. The first time they attacked, they killed nine people. The second time they killed five."

She trekked for days through the bush with dozens of other survivors. On the way, one 19-year-old woman who had recently given birth to a baby died suddenly in the night. "It was the fear," Ms. Sawadogo says simply.

Now, more than 7 million people face acute hunger in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger as armed groups cut off access to supplies and farmland, according to the World Food Programme (WFP).

Burkina Faso has deteriorated the fastest. Six years ago, the country was one of the most peaceful states in Africa and had never seen a terrorist attack. Now, more than a million Burkinabes have been displaced. Thousands of schools have been closed in rural areas because the extremists have targeted and killed teachers who teach Western subjects like French.

And aid workers say half a million Burkinabe children under five are acutely malnourished. In October, WFP officials said that over 10,000 people were "one step short of famine."

The food crisis is likely only to get worse in the coming years. Officials see the region as a canary in the coal mine for climate change. The Sahel regularly hits temperatures above 40°C, but some climate scientists believe this could rise 3 to 5°C warmer in 30 years.

Displaced Sahelians find themselves with practically no social safety net other than humanitarian and religious organizations, family members, and well-meaning strangers. One traditional healer in Kaya has gone above and beyond the call of civic duty. Two years ago, Ragnoubou Zaonao opened his small home to 85 people who had fled the fighting in their village of Dablo.

The displaced people now live alongside 14 members of Mr. Zaonao's own family under a few shelters in his dusty, litter-strewn compound. During the day, the men go out to find jobs in construction, while the women cook what food they have.

Sitting in the shade of a tree, in front of the mass of his cross-legged guests, the impoverished 60-year-old mystic chor-tles at his water bill and the smell from his constantly blocked squat toilet.

But his jolliness subsides when he starts to talk about the war just beyond the city's borders. "I feel so sad to think that human beings can do this to other human beings. We don't know where this hatred started," he says. "These people have nowhere to go. No food and no place to sleep. We have got no help from the government."

When asked how many people they saw killed, the crowd of men, women,

and children behind Mr. Zaonao take their time to count. Eventually, one man says they have seen more than 20 people killed by attackers. When asked who they think attacked them, no one answers.

One elderly man sitting next to Mr. Zaonao pipes up over the throng of voices: "We are scared. Whoever attacked us could come here. A day is enough for them to ride into town."

"I am not optimistic that there will be peace. To return to my land means I'm going to my death."



Traditional healer Ragnoubou Zaonao (front) is sheltering 85 displaced people—as well as 14 members of his own family—at his home in Kaya.

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Change Is Underway

By Stacie Murphy, Director of Congressional Relations

As the Biden administration continues to fill key staff positions and roll out new initiatives, there is a growing sense among family planning advocates that we are on the verge of some truly wonderful progress.

Budget Season Begins

As is typical during the first year of a presidential administration, the budget process is starting off a little later than normal. In mid-April, the Biden administration released a preview of its budget request for FY 2022. In it, the administration says it will be requesting \$10 billion for global health—that's an \$800 million increase over the current funding level. The preview budget suggests that the bulk of this increase should be spent on global health security. The global health budget is part of an overall international affairs funding request of \$63.5 billion—\$6.8 billion more than the current level.

The more detailed budget proposal with individual program funding levels is expected in May, after the print deadline for this issue. Both the House and Senate will wait for this more detailed outline before releasing their own proposed numbers. Meanwhile, we continue to advocate with our allies on the Hill

for robust funding for international family planning.

Helms Repeal Bill Reintroduced

On March 9, Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), joined by Reps. Barbara Lee (D-CA), Jackie Speier (D-CA), Ayanna Pressley (D-MA), Diana DeGette (D-CO), Norma Torres (D-CA), and freshman member Marilyn Strickland (D-WA), reintroduced the Abortion Is Health Care Everywhere Act (H.R. 1670). The bill would amend the Foreign Assistance Act to repeal the Helms Amendment and replace it with language explicitly stating that U.S. foreign assistance funds can be used to provide comprehensive reproductive health care, including abortion services.

Since 1973, the Helms Amendment has prohibited the use of U.S. foreign assistance funding for abortion “as a method of family planning.” The language has been interpreted as an outright ban on the use of such funds for abortion services under all circumstances, including in cases of rape and incest and when the life of the pregnant person is threatened by the pregnancy.

The Helms Amendment has been rightly criticized as imperialistic, hypocritical (in

the United States, there are important exceptions to the ban on federal funding for abortion, whereas there are none with regard to U.S. foreign assistance), and dangerous to the lives of those who will seek unsafe abortions in the absence of access to safe abortion services.

The impact of repeal would be dramatic. The Guttmacher Institute, looking only at countries where abortion is legal in at least some circumstances and where the U.S. already supports family planning programs, found that if the Helms Amendment were repealed and U.S. funding helped support safe abortion, each year those countries would see:

- 19 million fewer unsafe abortions,
- 17,000 fewer maternal deaths,
- 98 percent fewer maternal deaths due to abortion, and
- 12 million fewer women who have abortion-related complications requiring medical treatment.

Because the Helms Amendment is part of permanent statute, congressional action is required to repeal it. The Abortion Is Health Care Everywhere Act, first introduced in the last (116th) Congress, is the only bill ever introduced to repeal Helms. In a statement on the newly reintroduced bill, Congresswoman Schakowsky said:

Making abortion legal isn't the beginning of women having abortions. It's the end of women dying from abortions. It means that women will have what I think is the fundamental choice that describes their freedom: the right to control the size of their families.

EACH Act Reintroduced

On March 25, Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA) reintroduced the Equal Access to Abortion Coverage in Health Insurance Act of 2021 (The EACH Act S.1021/H.R.2234). The EACH Act would do away with the Hyde Amendment and guarantee abortion coverage to people who get their health insurance through the federal government. It would also forbid state and federal governments from prohibiting abortion coverage in private insurance plans.

First authored by Rep. Henry Hyde (R-IL) in 1976, the Hyde Amendment is not part of statutory law. Instead, it has been included as part of the congressional appropriations process every year since 1977. It forbids the use of federal dollars to pay for abortions, except in cases of rape, incest, and when the life of the pregnant person is threatened.

Initially, the Hyde Amendment was only applied to Medicaid, a joint state/federal health program for low-income people. Because the amendment restricts funding for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), it also impacts abortion funding under other programs, including Medicare, the Children's Health Insurance Program, and the Indian Health Service. In the years since its introduction, similar language has made its way into other federal programs, including the military health insurance program, the federal employees insurance program, the Peace Corps, and even the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

Because contributions to Medicaid come from both states and the federal government, states can choose to more broadly cover abortions, as long as they use their own money. Currently, only 16 states do so. The District of Columbia has done so in the past, but because its budget is subject to congressional approval, its residents' access is intermittent.

The Hyde Amendment is a significant equity issue: People enrolled in Medicaid are, by definition, low-income; they are more likely to be people of color; and they are more likely to experience an unintended pregnancy. Lack of Medicaid coverage for abortion services

means patients must pay out-of-pocket for the procedure. Costs vary widely depending on location, length of pregnancy, and type of abortion chosen, but an uninsured patient can expect to spend at least \$500—an enormous burden for someone already struggling financially.

Biden Moves to Undo Domestic Gag Rule

On April 14, HHS released a proposed new rule for Title X, the U.S. domestic family planning program for low-income individuals. The new rule would undo the onerous restrictions placed on the program under the Trump administration. That rule—dubbed the Domestic Gag Rule—which went into effect in 2019, has had devastating effects. An estimated 981 clinics left the program in 2019, slashing Title X's capacity by half and jeopardizing care for 1.6 million patients. Six states (Hawaii, Maine, Oregon, Utah, Vermont, and Washington) were left with no remaining Title X-funded providers.

Because this is a regulatory change, rather than a legislative one, there is a defined process that must be followed. It will take, at a minimum, several months for the new regulation to take effect, and even longer for providers to rejoin the program.



2021 Digital Capitol Hill Days Turned Inspiration Into Action

By YoVanna Solomon, Advocacy and Outreach Fellow

This year, over 200 people from across the country joined us virtually from the safety of their homes to advocate for reproductive rights around the world during our 2021 Digital Capitol Hill Days.

Congressional Meetings and Digital Day of Action

After five days of workshops and trainings (session titles and speakers at right), activists began to file into the Zoom room early Monday morning feeling confident and prepared for their constituent meetings. We had 86 participants who met with the offices of over 90 of their senators and representatives to advocate for the Global HER Act and for increased U.S. investment in international family planning and reproductive health services worldwide. Our participants met directly with key members of Congress, including Reps. Julia Brownley, Salud Carbajal, Judy Chu, Ann Kirkpatrick, David Price, and Jamie Raskin.

The activists made sure their elected officials understood their desire for the prioritization of global reproductive health. Additionally, roughly 400 people from across the country joined them in flooding congressional offices with over 1,200 emails, phone calls, and social media posts. We also stormed Twitter with a #Fight4HER “rally,” reaching over 5.3 million people.

Thanks to Our Lead Volunteers!

None of this would have been possible without the support and dedication of our Capitol Hill Days Leads, a core group of volunteers who worked tirelessly to schedule lobby meetings, facilitate participant engagement, help orchestrate sessions, and lead constituent meetings. A sincere and heartfelt thank you to Liz Boucher, Adjoa Coffie, Colette Picchietti Cragin, Danielle D’Angelo, Nohely Diaz, Josie Erdy, Kyrah Hughley, Ranjana Iyer, Madison Peterson, and Katie Yeager.

“My favorite part about Capitol Hill Days was that I was able to take part in the event as both an audience member and as a Lead Volunteer. As a Lead Volunteer, I enjoyed scheduling and, later on, leading meetings with the offices of members of Congress. I really valued the conversations that my lobby team members and I had with staffers.”

—Nohely Diaz

Wednesday, March 17 Voices From the Frontlines: Advocacy and Action for Reproductive Health Worldwide

- Dr. Tlaleng Mofokeng, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health
- Sandra Castañeda, General Coordinator, Red de Salud
- Michelle Dubón, Medical Director, WINGS Guatemala

Thursday, March 18 Pushing Forward a Bold Agenda on International Reproductive Health and Rights

- **Keynote:** Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL-9)
- Dara Purvis, Associate Dean for Research and Partnerships and Professor of Law, Penn State University School of Law; Vice Chair, Population Connection

Board of Directors

- María Antonieta Alcalde Castro, Director, Ipas Central America and Mexico
- Zara Ahmed, Associate Director of Federal Issues, Guttmacher Institute
- Serra Sippel, President, Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)

Friday, March 19 Population, Reproductive Health, and Climate Resiliency: Views From Latin America and East Africa

- Rodrigo Barillas, Executive Director, WINGS Guatemala; Member, Population Connection Board of Directors
- Dr. Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka, Founder and CEO, Conservation Through Public Health
- Steven Bloomstein, President, Turimiquire Foundation

- Janet Larsen, Founder & Principal, One Planet Strategies

Saturday, March 20 The Fight for LGBTQ+ Reproductive Health and Rights at Home and Abroad

- Colorado State Representative Leslie Herod
- Annemarie Kamuyu, Operations Manager, National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission
- Grace Kamau, Regional Coordinator, Africa Sex Workers Alliance
- Luisa Orza, HIV & Gender Technical Lead, Frontline AIDS

Sunday, March 21 The Politics of Family Planning

- Stacie Murphy, Director of Congressional Relations, Population Connection

Constituent Power Continues to Grow

In the weeks following Capitol Hill Days, we have met with attendees to discuss their experience at the event and help channel their inspiration into action. Many of the folks we met with had never lobbied before and found the opportunity to be both empowering and enlightening. Speaking with the offices of their elected officials illuminated the power that they hold as constituents to influence the policy decisions that shape the reproductive lives of people around the world. A few particularly motivated activists have chosen to amplify their voices by submitting letters to the editors of their local papers, while others have committed to continuing the dialogue around reproductive health and rights through hosting their own kitchen table conversations. Thanks to the success of Capitol Hill Days, our community of activists continues to grow!

“I’m really shy and generally try to avoid speaking in front of people. But it felt good to push myself beyond my boundaries to advocate for something that matters so much to me. I’m proud of myself for lobbying!”

—Jazmine John



Images, from top to bottom:

Rep. Jan Schakowsky giving her keynote address (over Zoom)

A lobby meeting with Rep. Carbajal, his staffer, constituent Rogan Thompquist, and Lindsay Apperson, our National Field Manager

A lobby meeting with Rep. Kirkpatrick, her staffer, and constituents Danielle D’Angelo, Kyrah Hughley, and Shilpita Sen



You can watch session videos here: popconnect.org/capitol-hill-days-2021/ and read our blog post recapping the event here: popconnect.org/digital-capitol-hill-days-2021-recap/



Meeting the Moment: Students Tackle Timely Issues in 2020-2021 Video Contest

By Pamela Wasserman, SVP for Education, and Isabelle Rios, Student Engagement Specialist

This marks the 10th year of our popular World of 7 Billion Student Video Contest, which engages middle and high school students in a range of environmental and social issues related to human population pressures.

For the 3,000+ students from 44 countries (including 49 U.S. states and territories) who took part in the 2020–2021 contest, there were unique challenges posed by COVID-19, including working remotely on their video projects with fewer opportunities for collaboration with classmates.

In addition to the pandemic, events exposing racial injustices dominated headlines in the U.S. and abroad in 2020. For this year's video topics (Promoting Environmental Justice, Strengthening Global Health, and Re-Imagining Industrial Systems), we wanted to meet the moment and give students a chance to explore the issues of the day in more depth, especially how they relate to Population Connection's work.

While these are challenging topics, students' productions showed their research, thoughtfulness, and hope. Their proposed solutions ask society

to rethink our approach to everything from agriculture and consumerism to reproductive health and infectious disease testing.

Many of the submissions come out of classroom assignments. Each September, the World of 7 Billion website debuts background readings for students on the new contest topics, plus filmmaking tips and resources, a graphic organizer, judging rubric, and related lesson plans for teachers. This school year, PopEd staff even visited classrooms remotely to answer student questions as they prepared their videos.

A panel of 60 judges, including educators, filmmakers, and policy experts, selected the winners from a pool of finalists determined by our Population Education staff. High school winners received \$1,200 for first place, \$600 for second place, and \$300 for honorable mention. Middle school winners received \$600 for first place and \$300 for second place.

You can view this year's winning entries, along with students' photos and bios, on our contest website: worldof7billion.org.

Honorable Mentions High School

"Stop the Mistreatment of Indigenous People"

Anna Paradise
Harborfield High School
Greenlawn, New York

"Climate Migrants"

Valerie Xiong
Piedmont High School
Piedmont, California

"Polluted to Pure"

Emmy Yang
Eastside Preparatory School
Kirkland, Washington

"Watching the World"

Grace Kaneshiro
International School of Indiana
Indianapolis, Indiana

"Lab-Grown Meat—Future Proteins"

Jensen Coonradt
Oswego East High School
Oswego, Illinois

"Digging Earth's Grave"

Crystallia Evelyn Liaw
Sinarماس World Academy
Tangerang, Indonesia

Promoting Environmental Justice

1st Place, High School

"Food (Deserts) for Thought"

Rana Duan

*Grade 12, Dulles High School
Sugar Land, Texas*

Rana's first place finish this year comes after winning honorable mentions in the 2019 and 2020 contests for videos on climate resiliency and biodiversity threats. This year, she used colorful animation to explain the problem of food deserts in underserved communities and to offer solutions for bringing healthy food options to people everywhere. This fall, Rana will be entering The University of Texas at Austin, where she plans to study economics and prepare for a career in environmental policy.

1st Place, Middle School

"A Solution to E-Waste"

Henry Zitoun

*Grade 7, Shorewood Intermediate School
Shorewood, Wisconsin*

A first-time filmmaker, Henry focused on the hazardous working conditions at e-waste dumping sites, especially at a notorious one in Ghana. "I discovered that the amount of devices outnumbered the global population and began to wonder what happens to all these devices when people are done with them." His video attempts to answer the questions he had and also proposes what consumers can do to be better stewards of the environment and communities around the globe.

2nd Place, High School

"Erase the Redline"

Tian Hsu

*Grade 12, St. Paul's Girls' School
London, United Kingdom*

Though she lives across the pond, Tian was inspired to learn more about structural racism in the United States, especially after the events of 2020. This led her to research the practice of redlining and to connect unfair residential zoning to health and climate issues. Tian has produced films for the U.K.'s 2020 Youth Climate Summit and for her school's environmental assemblies. She hopes to pursue a career in sustainable architecture.

2nd Place, Middle School

"Environmental Racism"

Stephanie Akinfolarin

*Grade 8, Westerly School
Long Beach, California*

Stephanie used animation software to explain the connections between racial and environmental injustices and to propose solutions to create more healthful living conditions in historically underserved communities, including designating more green spaces and introducing more restrictions on the placement of polluting industries.



Strengthening Global Health

1st Place, High School

"Wonder Women"

Alaina Smith

*Grade 12, Mt. Lebanon High School
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

Alaina channeled her passion for women's health and advocacy into a winning video on maternal mortality rates around the world and their connection to high fertility and other population trends. She first learned about population issues in her AP Environmental Science class and is especially interested in advocating for women's empowerment and family planning access. She'll be entering The College of William and Mary this fall and hopes to pursue a career in public health policy.



1st Place, Middle School

"Fossil Fuels and Our Health"

Kayla Brezenski

*Grade 8, Detroit Country Day School
Beverly Hills, Michigan*

Through her white-board drawings, Kayla explains how pollution from the burning of fossil fuels contributes to a host of health problems (cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, cancer, and more). She wanted to share her research because "people are aware of [fossil fuels'] effect on the earth, but not on our health." Her winning video advocates for a more rapid change to renewable energy sources.



2nd Place, High School

"The Importance of Maternal Health"

Amrita Guha

*Grade 9, Alsion Middle/High Montessori School
Fremont, California*

Amrita mastered claymation (stop-motion animation using original clay creations) to raise awareness about women's reproductive health issues and their connection to population trends, something she first learned about in her AP Environmental Science class. Her work on social justice includes her local community—she recently co-founded a nonprofit organization to combat anti-Asian hate.



2nd Place, Middle School

"Amping Up Testing"

Kennedy Merkel

*Grade 7, Shorewood Intermediate School
Shorewood, Wisconsin*

The pandemic was very much on Kennedy's mind last fall when she thought of a way to increase testing for COVID-19 through the U.S. mail. Her teacher, Sarah Kopplin, has long been assigning the World of 7 Billion contest to her middle school students and helps them work on different parts of the assignment over a period of months.



Re-Imagining Industrial Systems

1st Place, High School

"Carbon Tagging—a Solution to Consumer-Fueled Carbon Emissions"

Aidan Hurlock
*Grade 9, Barrington High School
Barrington, Rhode Island*

Judges were impressed with Aidan's idea of labeling everyday consumer goods with environmental impact data. By putting a label on a product, he figured, "people can compare the CO₂ emissions and may be more likely to choose items that have a lesser impact." Aidan's interest in filmmaking and the environment dates to fifth grade, when he started his own YouTube channel and took Jane Goodall's MasterClass on conservation.

1st Place, Middle School

"Managing E-Waste"

Arnav Bali
*Grade 7, Central Middle School
Edgewater, Maryland*

Arnav's hobby of fixing and rebuilding electronics led him to focus his winning video on e-waste. He was surprised to find out "how much e-waste goes to poor countries. I don't think it is fair that the waste goes there when many of those countries are already struggling." He's won prior awards for videos focusing on the endangered bee population and on the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Arnav recently purchased a green screen and may use his winnings for tools to help his filmmaking.

2nd Place, High School

"What Nobody Tells You About Your Favorite Products"

Luana Hasson de Lima Escamilla
*Grade 12, Colégio FAAP
São Paulo, Brazil*

Luana's video considers the social justice issues related to mica, a common ingredient in cosmetics that is often mined by child laborers. "Many young people feel that they cannot do anything to change the world, but just talking about issues and giving them visibility already creates a great impact on our community." Last fall, Luana started a non-profit, Fluxo Sem Tabu, which provides sanitary napkins to those in need, breaking the menstruation taboo.

2nd Place, Middle School

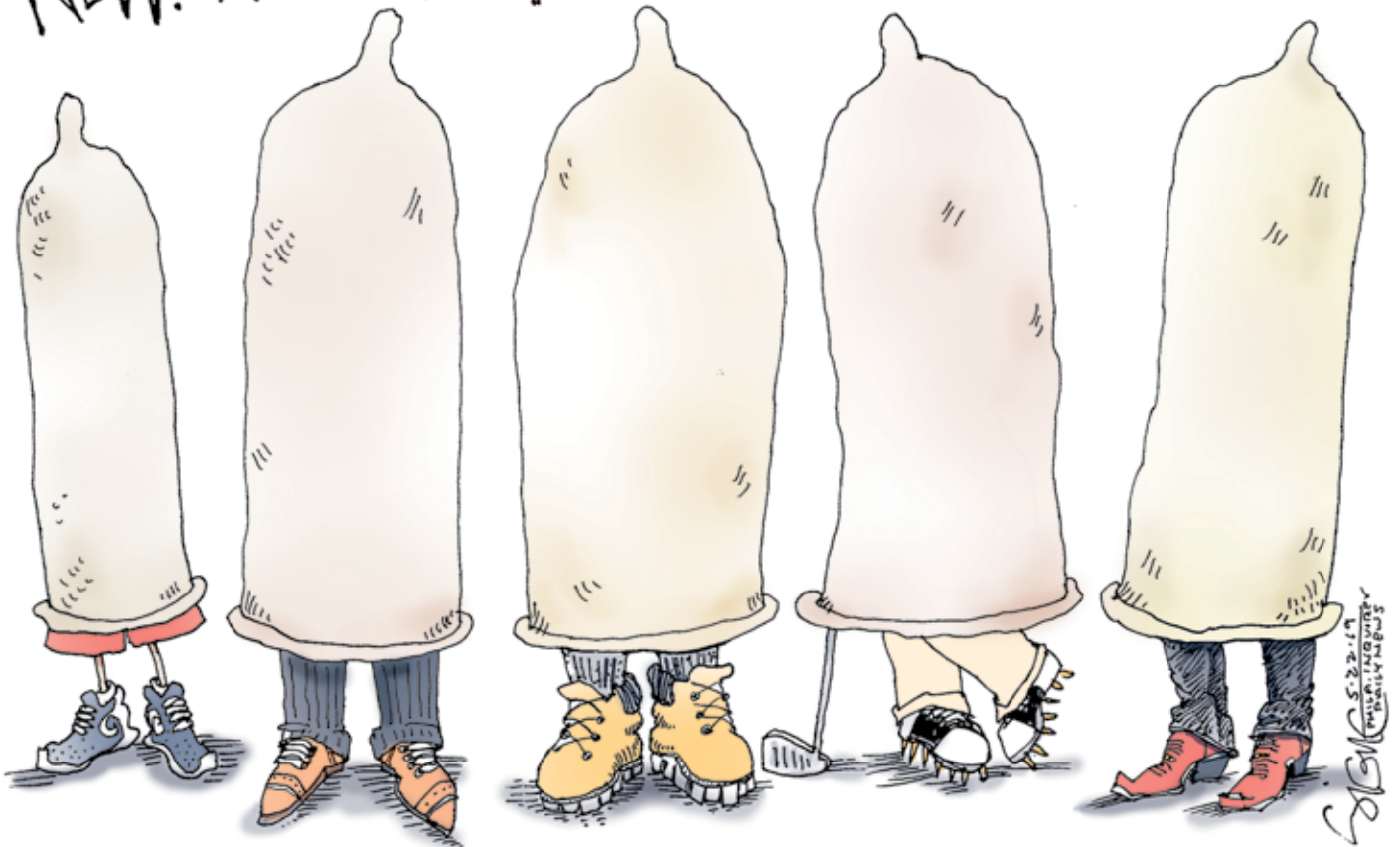
"Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs)"

Emalee Leishman
*Grade 8, Idaho Arts Charter School
Nampa, Idaho*

Emalee advocates for more sustainable and humane farming practices. Her video deftly explains the environmental impacts of CAFOs, the source of most of the meat we buy in grocery stores. This is her second year participating in the World of 7 Billion contest and her first year as a winner.



NEW! MENSWEAR for ABORTION-BAN STATES...



Signe Wilkinson Editorial Cartoon used with permission of Signe Wilkinson, the Washington Post Writers Group and the Cartoonist Group. All rights reserved.

Los Angeles Times

How big a deal is it that California's congressional delegation will drop from 53 to 52, the first such loss in representation since statehood in 1850?

Census figures released Monday showed that 39,538,223 people lived in the state in 2020, continuing a population-growth plateau that began 10 years ago.

It's a turning point to be sure, and of course no state would prefer a smaller share of power to a larger one.

But it's hardly a stunning setback. In fact it's part of a long-running shift not away from us, but toward us. In the last 10 years, California grew by 2 million people. That's more than the total populations in 14 other states. California's congressional delegation remains by far the largest and will continue to be for quite some time. California has been the nation's most populous state since 1962 and is likely to remain so for many decades.

Yet all that growth, which fueled what some have called the California dream, has paradoxically endangered that dream by straining our natural and economic resources. The state has matured and could use a little breathing room to catch up with itself.

...

Texas, the population runner-up, gained two seats and will get a roughly corresponding share of those federal funds. Along with a tip of the hat, California might want to offer a measure of commiseration. Growth spurs optimism but also challenges, including disparities in wealth and opportunity — and those inequities can turn into undercounts the next time around.

— April 26, 2021

THE LANCET

As Joe Biden picks up the pieces in the aftermath of the Trump administration, the U.S. President on January 28 rescinded the ... Global Gag Rule (GGR). By signing the Memorandum on Protecting Women's Health at Home and Abroad Biden affirms the policy of the new administration to support "women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights in the U.S. as well as globally," a welcome step in undoing the regressive GGR.

...

Although advocacy groups and NGOs have been quick to support Biden's action, it is believed that the long-term effects of the GGR have set back efforts to provide integrated HIV/AIDS services in affected countries by years. Long-term relationships with NGOs who chose not to accept U.S. funding have been disrupted, and many NGOs may be wary of accepting funding going forward.

... The Global Health, Empowerment, and Rights Act has been reintroduced to Congress by a bipartisan group of U.S. legislators. If passed, the Act would permanently prohibit the GGR by allowing foreign NGOs to provide safe abortion care, counseling, referrals, and advocacy by using their own non-U.S. funds, removing the threat of the GGR by executive order.

The GGR has been a flawed health policy squarely aimed at appeasing a right-wing political agenda and ideology, a policy steeped in inequity where predominantly white male decision makers had scant regard for the lives of thousands of mostly Black girls and women. Repealing the GGR is an important step in addressing the new U.S. administration's commitment to women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and the global HIV response. However, further action must be taken to end the specter of the GGR for good and the damage done to the health of women and girls affected by the policy.

— March 1, 2021

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