

# POPULATION CONNECTION

Volume 55, Issue 2  
June 2023



**DEFORESTATION IN  
THE CONGO BASIN  
IS DESTROYING THE  
PLANET'S LARGEST  
CARBON SINK**

# President's Note

John Seager

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While attending a posh party on Shelter Island, Kurt Vonnegut remarked to Joseph Heller that their wealthy host might have made more money the previous day than Heller had made through a lifetime of royalties from his 1961 novel *Catch-22*. Heller responded that he had something which their host might never have: “The knowledge that I’ve got enough.”

So, when is enough enough? As for stuff, some of us have more than we need—or perhaps even want. Conversely, there are billions who simply don’t have enough when it comes to clean water, food, housing, or health care. We should do what we can to help meet the needs of those whose lives are a daily struggle, while also addressing overconsumption here in the United States and elsewhere.

Congratulations to our Board Chair, Estelle Raboni, who received a 2023 Distinguished Service Award for Excellence in Response from the New York City Department of Health for launching the first, city-run Abortion Access Hub! Since its introduction on November 1, 2022, the Hub has served over 1,300 women seeking abortion services in NYC. We are so proud to have Estelle leading Population Connection!


Too often, when anyone dares to discuss human overpopulation, sudden silence ensues. We must break that silence by asking the population question: When is enough enough?

Numerous studies have examined the question of how many people the planet can support. Estimates range

from modest (500 million) to ludicrous (a trillion). Why fixate on some upper limit as if we’re determined to cram Planet Earth like a clown car?

Let’s turn the question around by considering how many people would be too few. For virtually the entirety of Earth’s history, the number of humans remained constant at exactly zero. That seems a bit on the low side to me, but I may be biased. Human population only began to soar about two centuries ago, when we hit the 1 billion mark following several hundred thousand years of barely perceptible population growth. Barring some global cataclysm, if the current trend toward smaller families were to expand to the point where the world average fell below replacement rate, it might take several centuries or more to get us back to a more sustainable level. No doubt, some socioeconomic shifts would prove challenging. Then again, consider all the problems that plague the world due to our soaring global numbers.

Lately, we’ve seen much hand-wringing about putative economic perils of population stabilization and decline. But whose economy is it anyway? Why couldn’t we have a less crowded world where everyone has everything they need, along with a decent share of that which makes life interesting and engaging?

After exploiting nature nonstop for the past two centuries through our burgeoning numbers and conspicuous consumption, wouldn’t it be polite, not to mention smart, to ensure living space for all—including the 10 million other species with whom we cohabit this wondrous planet? There is a word for this: stewardship. 

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*Population Connection* (ISSN 2331-0529)

Population Connection is the national grassroots population organization that educates young people and advocates progressive action to stabilize world population at a level that can be sustained by Earth's resources.

Annual membership (\$25) includes a one-year subscription to *Population Connection* magazine, published quarterly. Population Connection is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. As such, contributions, bequests, and gifts are fully tax-deductible in accordance with current laws.

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Volume 55, Issue 2  
June 2023



## Features

### 10 | **Eight Billion People in the World Is a Crisis, Not an Achievement**

By Naomi Oreskes, PhD

### 12 | **The Disappearing “Lungs of Africa” Deforestation in the Congo Basin**

By Olivia Nater



**Cover image:** Internally displaced people carry charcoal from the forest at the foot of Nyiragongo volcano in Virunga National Park to the market in Kibati, Democratic Republic of the Congo, on January 13, 2023. *Guerchom Ndebo/AFP via Getty Images*

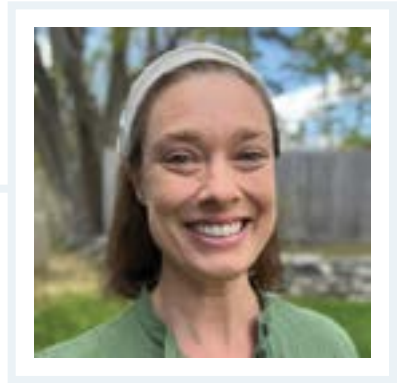
## Departments

- |    |                                   |    |                      |
|----|-----------------------------------|----|----------------------|
| 2  | Editor's Note                     | 22 | Washington View      |
| 3  | Letters to the Editor             | 24 | Field & Outreach     |
| 4  | Pop Facts                         | 26 | Population Education |
| 6  | In the News                       | 30 | Global Partners      |
| 8  | President's Circle Member Profile | 32 | Editorial Excerpts   |
| 21 | Virtual Events                    | 33 | Cartoon              |



# Editor's Note

Marian Starkey  
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We were pleased when we saw Harvard University Prof. Naomi Oreskes' opinion piece, "Eight Billion People in the World Is a Crisis, Not an Achievement," in *Scientific American* in March. I immediately contacted her for permission to reprint it, which she readily granted—it's on page 10 of this issue.

What I didn't expect (though perhaps should have) was a response to the piece a few weeks later, published in *The Atlantic*, scolding Prof. Oreskes for scolding people for having children (which she did not do). The authors of that op-ed work at the Breakthrough Institute, a think-tank that "identifies and promotes technological solutions to environmental and human development challenges." I think we'd all be curious to know which technological solutions they've identified for feeding 10 billion or more people while halting the environmental consequences that already result from our agricultural practices used to feed 8 billion people—carbon and methane emissions, deforestation, fresh water overdraw, soil erosion, fertilizer runoff, etc.

One of those consequences of expanding agriculture to feed more people—deforestation—is presently eating up the world's largest tropical carbon sink: the Congo Basin in west-central Africa. The region boasts the second largest tropical forest in the world, after the Amazon, and the largest intact forest landscape. It's also a biodiversity hotspot—one out of every five species on Earth is found there. As subsistence farming, expanding settlements, and commercial activities encroach on the "Lungs of Africa," a key mitigation tool in the fight against climate change is being destroyed.

Population Connection Communications Manager Olivia Nater writes about the environmental significance of the Congo Basin and about the various drivers of forest loss there in her feature article which begins on page 12. It surprised me to learn that most (84 percent) of the forest loss in the Congo Basin is due to small-scale subsistence farming, which is directly tied to population growth. More people needing food, after all, requires (in the absence of heightened agricultural productivity) more farmland.

We all know that unsustainable levels of consumption among the world's wealthiest people led us to the planetary predicament we find ourselves in now, facing down a plethora of environmental tipping points that will be catastrophic when breached, in ways we can only hypothesize. There's no way around it: Wealthy people the world over must drastically reduce their (our) per capita consumption.

But that doesn't mean we should ignore the fact that middle-income countries are projected to grow from 6 billion today to 7 billion by 2050 and have growing middle classes who (rightfully) strive to increase their consumption to pave the way for a better quality of life. Or that low-income countries, where it's critical that per capita consumption rises in order to meet everyone's basic human rights, are projected to add 600 million people by 2050. Population growth is by no means the entire story when it comes to deforestation and climate change, but it is an integral part and one that we can't afford to overlook, especially if we are truly committed to a more equitable global distribution of resources. 

# Letters to the Editor

John Seager's March President's Note was right on target. I think we (population, environment, and energy folks) need to encourage research and publication of "getting smaller" stories. When a city, town, municipality, zip code, county, state, or country gets smaller, the answer is not to import more people or to encourage more births, but to downsize wisely. As you said, billions of dollars are invested in growth, but few are invested in right-sizing governments, social welfare systems, etc. Right-sizing communities is not as exciting as saving lives, saving wildlife, restoring forests, electrification, etc., but it is every bit as important.

Barbara Bird

As long as our capitalist culture and predominant religious entities rely upon, and indeed encourage, continued and unremitting population growth, we will be faced with mounting overpopulation concerns. The current climate crisis, wildlife extinctions, deforestation, and other environmental and biological threats are merely ignored or poo-pooed by the very institutions most able to help. We are in the midst of a very scary era of human development. I fear that it may take even more worldwide disasters of biblical proportion to sway public sentiment into a more responsible and sustainable position.

Dave Hingtgen

I was pleased to read in the December 2022 issue about Mechai Viravaidya. I spent several weeks negotiating a USAID contract with him when I was working for an international engineering consulting firm in 1984 or thereabouts. At that time, his business cards were embossed on condoms, which he handed out cheerfully, with the suggestion they be used. Pretty groundbreaking. It's great to see him still in a leadership role.

You report on Thailand's population going from 40 million in 1974 to 72 million in 2022, which, while substantial, still speaks to a slowing compared to locations that have not had as much success with voluntary fertility decline—Egypt, for example, where I was stationed from 1975–1978. That country's population was then also about 40 million. Our firm was helping Egypt begin to rehabilitate its infrastructure upon the departure of the Russians, as well as helping the government plan for the future. Our resident economist presented then-President Anwar Sadat's Advisory Committee for Reconstruction with a graph showing how the country's population would double to 80 million in 30 years. They responded, "Tsk,tsk, not possible." Our economist asked, "Why not possible?" Their response: "No room." Because, even then, Egypt was teeming with people, almost entirely situated on the narrow, irrigated margins along the Nile, around the delta extending from Cairo to the Mediterranean coast, and along the Suez Canal. But unlike Thailand, and in spite of there being "no room," Egypt did almost exactly double in population in 30 years, and by 2022, its population stood at 111 million, nearly 40 million more than Thailand's. I don't want to point fingers, nor do I wish to cast doubt on Egypt being able to keep this up, but there has to be a lesson in here somewhere.

Population impact has always been a concern of mine and so I share these stories. I guess I am somewhat heartened by the recent *National Geographic* issue that predicts some leveling off of population in certain areas, in spite of new pushes to have more children to support the aging. Yikes. How do we rein in this madness before our poor old planet just can't sustain its growth?! Good luck to us all.

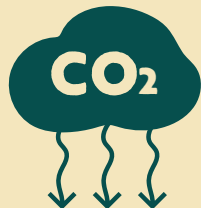
Eric Dodge

# Population Growth & Poverty Threaten Congo Basin Forests



**1** <sup>IN</sup> **5**  
OF THE PLANET'S  
**RECORDED SPECIES**  
IS FOUND IN THE  
**FORESTS OF THE**  
**CONGO BASIN.**

THE CONGO BASIN'S  
FORESTS ARE THE  
**WORLD'S**  
**LARGEST**  
**TROPICAL**  
**CARBON SINK,**  
**ABSORBING**  
**0.61**  
**NET GIGATONS**  
OF CARBON DIOXIDE  
EQUIVALENTS PER YEAR.



THE FORESTS OF THE  
CONGO BASIN  
**PROVIDE**  
**LIVELIHOODS FOR**  
**60**  
**MILLION**  
PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN  
OR NEAR FOREST AREAS  
AND INDIRECTLY  
**FEED THE**  
**40**  
**MILLION**  
PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN  
NEARBY URBAN CENTERS.

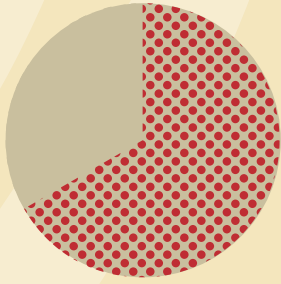


ALMOST

**2/3**

**OF THE POPULATION**

**OF THE CONGO BASIN COUNTRIES  
LIVE IN POVERTY.**



## **SUBSISTENCE AGRICULTURE**

BY SMALL-SCALE FARMERS  
IN RURAL AREAS IS THE  
**MAIN DRIVER OF  
DEFORESTATION  
& DEGRADATION**  
IN THE CONGO BASIN,  
ACCOMPANIED BY THE  
CONSTRUCTION OF  
ROADS AND SETTLEMENTS.



## **THE POPULATION**

OF THE REGION  
(CURRENTLY 180 MILLION)  
IS PROJECTED TO

**DOUBLE BY 2050.**

Source:  
Forest Declaration Assessment  
Regional Assessment 2022  
Tracking progress towards forest goals in the Congo Basin  
November 2022  
[forestdeclaration.org](http://forestdeclaration.org)



# IN THE NEWS

By Olivia Nater, Communications Manager

## India officially world's largest population

According to the latest UN projections, India has officially overtaken China (which has peaked and begun shrinking) as the world's largest population. At the end of June, India is expected to have 1.4286 billion people, compared to China's 1.4257 billion. Of course, demographic estimates are never 100 percent accurate—data released in January by China's National Bureau of Statistics suggest China may have already slipped behind India at the beginning of this year.

India's total fertility rate (the average number of live births per woman) dropped below the 2.1 replacement level in 2020, but due to the large number of women of childbearing age, the population is projected to continue growing to just short of 1.7 billion in the early 2060s.

## Financial incentives fail to boost birth rates

South Korea's fertility rate has been the world's lowest for around a decade, but it's dropped even further, shrinking from 0.81 in 2021 to only 0.78 births per woman in 2022. In response, President Yoon Suk Yeol is rolling out more measures to encourage South Koreans to have children. Since 2022,

mothers have been receiving a one-off payment of 2 million won (\$1,510) upon the birth of a child. There is also a monthly allowance for parents of infants up to the age of one, which increased this year and will go up further in 2024, from 700,000 won (\$528) to 1 million won (\$755). Additional payments exist for children up until elementary school age, as well as for low-income households, single parents, and, in some areas, for mothers who have given birth more than three times. Over the past 16 years, South Korea has spent over \$200 billion on policies aimed at boosting births, but the birth rate has only continued to decline.

Fewer than 400,000 babies were born in Italy in 2022, a new historic low, despite a rollout of monthly payments up to €175 (\$194) for every child up until age 21. Italy has one of the lowest fertility rates in Europe, at 1.3 children per woman, and the population has been slowly shrinking since 2014.

Births in Japan have also dropped to a new low, and the country's population shrank by over half a million people between 2021 and 2022. The Japanese government has long tried, and failed, to reverse this trend with financial incentives. In April, the childbirth allowance increased from 420,000

to 500,000 yen (\$3,700), and the government launched a new Children and Families Agency, focused on supporting parents and their children's health and education.

Many governments of other low-fertility countries are trying to encourage people to have more babies, with similarly poor success. While modest increases could likely be achieved if policies successfully tackled high cost of living, low wages, lack of job security, and patriarchal attitudes, it's the norm for countries to converge below the 2.1 replacement rate once women gain power over their bodies and lives.

## UN survey: many believe planet is overpopulated

A survey of almost 8,000 adults across eight countries (Brazil, Egypt, France, Hungary, India, Japan, Nigeria, and the United States), commissioned by UNFPA, found that in every country surveyed, the most common view among respondents being asked their attitudes about population size was that the global population is too large.

The survey was part of the research that went into UNFPA's *State of World Population 2023* report, published in April, which focuses on attitudes toward population size and how



extreme views in either direction can be harmful. Unfortunately, the report claims all overpopulation narratives are problematic, citing common misconceptions such as that they place the blame on poor and marginalized communities.

## Historic deal for oceans reached

Following almost two decades of negotiations, nations agreed in March on a deal to protect the world's oceans. Commonly referred to as the "High Seas Treaty," the agreement aims to protect biodiversity by establishing large-scale protected areas (in line with last year's UN biodiversity agreement which calls for protecting 30 percent of marine areas by 2030), and regulating damaging activities such as overfishing and deep-sea mining. The high seas, two-thirds of the world's oceans, don't fall under national jurisdiction, so exploitation of their resources has so far been a 'free-for-all,' with dire consequences for marine life. Countries still need to formally adopt the treaty, and it will likely take several years for policies in support of its goals to be implemented.

## New report disproves own claim that population is irrelevant

A report published in March by Earth4All, a group of prominent think-tanks, including The Club of Rome (which was behind 1972's influential *Limits to Growth*


report), argues that it is unequal resource distribution, rather than overpopulation, that is driving our environmental crises. The authors' models show that we could live within our planet's means if everyone on Earth (currently 8 billion and counting) adopted a minimum standard of living with an annual income per person of \$15,000–\$19,500, provided an equal distribution of resources.

This convergence of living standards to just above the poverty line is not only impossible to implement, it also proves that our numbers do matter by demonstrating how drastically we would need to slash consumption in the absence of population action.

The report also suggests that under "business as usual," our global population could peak at just 8.8 billion people in 2050, before declining to 7.3 billion by 2100. These projections are a lot lower than the UN's, which calculate a peak of 10.4 billion in the 2080s, and no significant decline during the remainder of the century. The Earth4All models differ by using the historical global trend in GDP per capita as a predictor of future fertility rates. However, in the regions with the highest fertility rates, GDP per capita has largely been stagnating. The report ignores that lowering fertility rates by improving access to family planning and education is often a necessary precursor to accelerated economic development.

## Taliban bans contraception

In February, Afghanistan's Taliban government forbade the sale of contraceptives, enforcing the ban through threats to pharmacies and midwives. In the Taliban's interpretation of Sharia law, family planning is a Western ploy to control the Muslim population. Women and girls are already excluded from higher education and most workplaces, as well as certain public spaces. The contraception ban represents another massive blow to Afghan women's rights, as well as a huge threat to their health and lives.

Afghanistan has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, at 620 deaths per 100,000 live births. With no means to prevent unwanted pregnancy or even space births, this drastic act will cause even more maternal complications and preventable deaths. 

The digital version of this article includes hyperlinked sources:

[popconnect.org/article/in-the-news-june-2023/](https://popconnect.org/article/in-the-news-june-2023/)

# PRESIDENT'S CIRCLE MEMBER

## Bruce Colburn

President's Circle members contribute annual gifts of \$1,000 or more, providing the financial foundation for our educational and advocacy efforts. Development Manager Sarah Ikemoto caught up with President's Circle member Bruce Colburn in April. We are grateful to Bruce and all of our President's Circle members for their generosity and commitment to our mission!

Science led Bruce Colburn to Population Connection, as well as his deep concern for environmental protection. Bruce recalls:

I was working as an artist and translator in Paris, so I reached out to the NGO Démographie Responsable, a French equivalent of Population Connection, and offered to do pro-bono translation. They needed their documents translated from French to English so they could work with their international partners. Working for Démographie Responsable—translating articles, press releases, and interviews into English—allowed me to donate thousands of dollars of services while also learning about the complexities between human population and the environment.

Translating familiarized him with cutting-edge population science:

I learned the science underpinning key concepts like overshoot,


carrying capacity, and ecological footprint. I read with amazement the article “The Climate Mitigation Gap” by Seth Wynes and Kimberly Nicholas, which named and measured the ecological stress of uncurbed population growth. It was quite an education. It seemed obvious that environmental degradation (biodiversity loss, climate change, pollution) was the single biggest threat to humanity. I really think reaching a sustainable population is THE defining generational challenge: The stakes are sky-high.

Equally obvious, it seemed to Bruce, was that our environmental challenges stemmed from a single root problem: human overpopulation. “The more of us there are, the more stress we put on the planet's resources.”

Bruce wanted to become part of the solution and was inspired to work toward population stabilization. When he moved back to the United States in 2020, he joined Population

Connection as a member of our President's Circle. He found us through a web search, looking for a population-oriented organization that focused on “inclusivity, solutions, and a can-do attitude.” Later, deepening his involvement, Bruce attended Population Education's Leadership Institute in 2022, becoming a volunteer teacher trainer. Bruce enjoyed the Leadership Institute, sharing that it “is what learning should always be: fun activities, common sense, and purpose.”

Bruce is a painter who works in watercolor and oil and a sculptor who focuses on the themes of environmental protection, climate change, and sustainable population. His work encourages people to cherish the beauty of our natural world and to acknowledge the urgency of the challenges that threaten to destroy it. You can view a selection of his pieces on his website ([brucecolburn.weebly.com](http://brucecolburn.weebly.com)) and on the page opposite.

We're grateful to Bruce for his continued commitment to protecting the planet we all call home and for supporting our work as a member of the President's Circle! 

If you would like to learn more about joining the President's Circle, please contact one of our development officers at [giving@popconnect.org](mailto:giving@popconnect.org). We'd love to hear from you!



Eight (number, in billions, of people on the planet)



Changing Directions



Stressed Ecosystem



Five (number of centuries it takes plastic to decompose)



Branch With Plastic Bottle

To view more of Bruce’s sculptures and to see a selection of his oil and watercolor paintings, visit [brucecolburn.weebly.com](http://brucecolburn.weebly.com).

# EIGHT BILLION PEOPLE IN THE WORLD IS A CRISIS, NOT AN ACHIEVEMENT

## More people will not solve the problem of too many people

By Naomi Oreskes, PhD

The world reached two important milestones toward the end of last year. First, the human population passed 8 billion in November, a whopping increase of 1 billion people since 2011. Then, in December, representatives of 188 governments adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, promising to conserve and manage at least 30 percent of the planet for biodiversity and restore 30 percent of currently degraded ecosystems.

Press coverage did not generally link these two events, but it should have. The major driver of plant and animal loss is habitat destruction caused primarily by the encroachment of a swelling human population. More people “has meant that ever more natural

habitat is being used for agriculture, mining, industrial infrastructure, and urban areas,” says the Royal Society, one of the world’s leading scientific groups. About 1 million plant and animal species are nearing extinction, and at least 1,000 breeds of mammals used for human food and agriculture are threatened.

We ought to have a plan for slowing the destructive surge in human population. But we don’t. In fact, many people defend it. Consider a recent *Washington Post* editorial saying 8 billion people is “probably a good thing.” The authors’ reasoning: Population has “more than doubled since 1968, and living standards around the world have vastly, though unevenly, improved.” With an ever increasing population, the editorialists write, “Millions of

**We ought to have a plan for slowing the destructive surge in human population. But we don’t. In fact, many people defend it.**

new people—with their new ideas and fresh energy—are on the way,” and this will spur innovation that will solve our problems.

This argument is a retread of a theoretical framework that was named cornucopianism in the 1980s. Cornucopians, led by economist Julian Simon and military strategist Herman Kahn, argued that anxiety over limited

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natural resources is misguided because human ingenuity can overcome any limits. Let populations grow alongside markets operating under minimal government constraints, and people will invent solutions to whatever problems they face.


It's true that technological innovations in the 19th and 20th centuries created more agricultural productivity—enough to feed much of a growing population. But the cornucopian perspective ignores other important facts. For instance, an enormous number of these inventions came into being through government actions. From the canals and railroads of the 19th century to the interstate highways and internet of the 20th, most large-scale technological achievements have relied, at least in part, on government initiatives

and support. Big gains in health and life expectancy stemmed from state investments in scientific research and public health. In the early 21st century, the price of renewable solar energy fell dramatically, largely because of state-funded research and policies to help ensure demand.

And although much of our population grew healthily in the 20th century, hundreds of millions died in famines, pandemics, and wars. Scientists have been warning us about the risks of anthropogenic climate disruption since the 1950s, but technological progress has not stopped the unfolding climate crisis.

It's both counterfactual and illogical to imagine that more people will solve the problem of too many people. Most population growth is occurring in poor countries, where most people lack educational opportunities that might enable them to develop the kinds of ideas and skills they would need to apply their “fresh energy.” And, as the biodiversity agreement makes clear, the issue isn't just living standards as measured by per capita income. It's also quality of life,

which is threatened by widespread degradation and destruction of nature.

Population control is a vexing subject because in the past it has generally been espoused by rich people (mostly men) instructing people in poor countries (mostly women) on how to behave. Prior attempts at limiting population surges have been tainted by racism, sexism, and class prejudice. But there are reasonable ways to slow growth. For one, women and girls should have greater access to education. Studies show opportunities to learn are an effective means to slow population increases. Focusing on that goal—which has many other benefits—most likely will produce the fresh energy and ideas that we need across the globe. It is much more realistic than fatuously assuring listeners that in the future, somehow, all will be well. 

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Naomi Oreskes, PhD is Henry Charles Lea Professor of the History of Science and Affiliated Professor of Earth and Planetary Sciences at Harvard University. A world-renowned earth scientist, historian, and public speaker, she is the author or co-author of nine books and over 150 articles, essays, and opinion pieces.



# THE DISAPPEARING “LUNGS OF AFRICA” DEFORESTATION IN THE CONGO BASIN

By Olivia Nater, Communications Manager





**As the planet continues to warm, humans are destroying the largest tropical carbon sink in the world due to poverty, conflict, and population growth. The forests of the Congo Basin, in west-central Africa, provide invaluable environmental services, including harboring thousands of species, increasing rainfall in drier regions that desperately need it, and absorbing climate changing carbon emissions. In addition, millions of people depend on the Congo Basin forests for their food and income. As populations grow and encroach upon this remarkable forest landscape in order to expand agriculture, remove timber, mine precious minerals, and hunt wildlife, one of our best tools to fight catastrophic climate change is going up in smoke.**

Internally displaced people carry charcoal from the forest at the foot of Nyiragongo volcano in Virunga National Park to the market in Kibati, DRC, on January 13, 2023. After the resurgence of the M23 rebellion north of Goma City, tens of thousands of people have crowded into makeshift camps in the Nyiragongo. They are struggling to find enough food for their families, so they turned to charcoal production. In less than two months, more than 200 hectares of trees were cut down. The forest of the Nyiragongo volcano will soon be nothing but stumps. *Guerchom Ndebo/AFP via Getty Images*

# The Congo Basin,

named after the Congo River that runs through it, is an area in west-central Africa of approximately 1.3 million square miles (about twice the size of Alaska) that spans across six countries—Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Republic of the Congo (Congo), Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon.

The area, often referred to as the “Lungs of Africa,” has special environmental significance as it covers close to 70 percent of the forestlands of the entire African continent. The Basin’s tropical forest is the second largest in the world, after the Amazon rainforest.

The Congo Basin countries are some of the poorest in the world, especially the two largest by land area, DRC and CAR, which respectively rank 179th and 188th out of all countries on the Human Development Index, a summary of achievement in key dimensions of human development, including health, education, and standard of living. Annual GDP per capita ranges from \$461 in CAR to \$8,635 in Gabon.

## Environmental significance

The Congo Basin includes a rich diversity of ecosystems, including dense tropical forests, dry forests, peatlands, and mangroves. This makes it an amazing biodiversity hotspot—an

estimated one in five recorded species is found in the Congo Basin.

Unlike the Amazon rainforest and the tropical forests of Indonesia, which have suffered large-scale, industrial deforestation for decades, the forests of the Congo Basin are still relatively intact. The Congo Basin is now the largest net carbon sink in the tropics, making it a critical weapon in the global fight against climate change and its impacts.

Rainforests also play an important role in regulating climates by releasing moisture into the atmosphere via transpiration and lowering surface

The forests of the Congo Basin removed an estimated 0.61 net gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent emissions per year between 2001 and 2019—nearly six times the net removals of the Amazon Basin forests, which cover almost three times as much area, and equivalent to about one-third of the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from all U.S. transportation.



temperatures through increased humidity and shade. The Congo Basin is a major source of rainfall in the drought-stricken Sahel region, where every drop is key to maintaining food production.

## Economic and cultural significance

Around 60 million people living in or near the Congo Basin forests derive their livelihoods directly from the goods and services provided by the forest ecosystems, including through hunting, fishing, agriculture, and the sale of forest products, such as timber and bushmeat. The forest also provides livelihoods for another 40 million people living in nearby urban centers.

The forests are home to several Indigenous hunter-gatherer tribes, including the Aka, Babenjelle, Babi, Babongo, Bacwa, Bagyeli, Baka, Bakola, and Bakoya (previously collectively referred to as “Pygmies”





## Endangered Regional Megafauna

So far, 20,000 species of plants, 1,300 species of birds, 400 species of mammals, 400 species of reptiles, and 336 species of amphibians have been recorded in these forests. Many of these species are found nowhere else on Earth and are classified as threatened on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List.

**Forest elephants:** African forest elephants are classified as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List, as more than 80 percent of the population is estimated to have been lost since 1984. They are particularly vulnerable among African elephants as they have a very long generation time (31 years), meaning they recover from population reductions three times more slowly than savanna elephants. Over 50 percent of forest elephants are now found in the small Congo Basin country of Gabon.

**Gorillas:** The Congo Basin is home to both species of gorilla, western and (to a lesser degree) eastern, both of which are listed as Critically Endangered. They are our second-closest living relatives, sharing 98 percent of their genetic code with humans. While both species are declining in numbers, at around 300,000, western gorillas are overall better off than eastern gorillas, of which fewer than 5,000 are thought to remain.

**Chimpanzees:** Chimpanzees, along with bonobos, are our closest living relatives, sharing approximately 99 percent of our DNA. They are found only in the forests of western and central Africa, and are listed as Endangered by the IUCN, which estimates that fewer than 300,000 remain in the wild.

**Bonobos:** Smaller and more peaceful than chimpanzees, bonobos are our other closest living relative. Bonobos are also listed as Endangered and can only be found in DRC. It is not clear how many bonobos remain because survey efforts have been hampered by the remote nature of their habitat and years of civil unrest.

**Drills:** With a relatively small and very fragmented habitat in western Cameroon, southeast Nigeria, and Bioko Island in Equatorial Guinea, drills are considered Endangered, with only an estimated 4,000 individuals remaining in the wild.

**Okapis:** The giraffe's only close living relative, the okapi is classified as Endangered by the IUCN. Like bonobos, they are now only found in the rainforests of DRC, and their current population size is unknown but thought to be decreasing.

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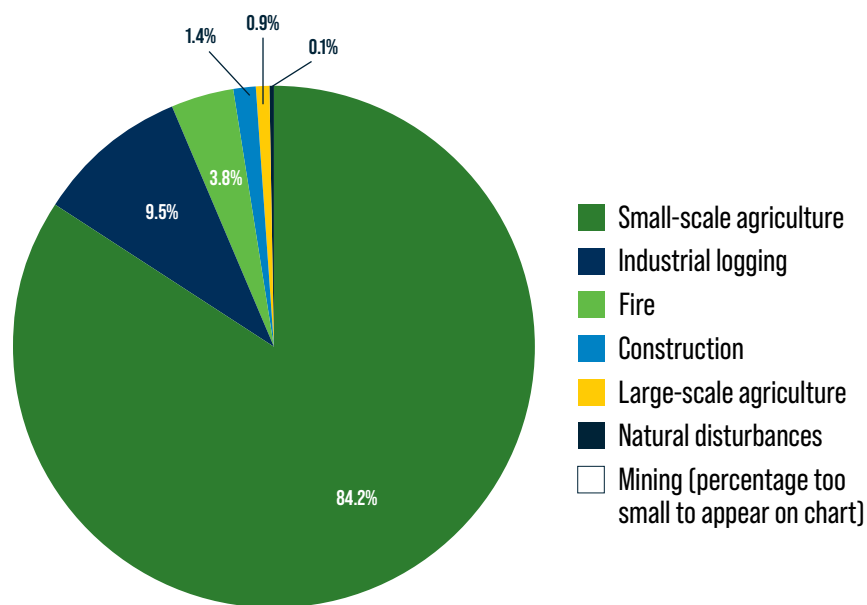


Tree stumps scar the forest floor after 850 hectares were felled to plant oil palms in the heart of the Congo Basin forest near Kisangani, in northeastern DRC, on September 25, 2019. There is strong pressure on the Congo Basin forests—in 2018, DRC lost 481,248 hectares of tropical primary forest. Samir Tounsi/AFP via Getty Images

due to their small stature). Another group, the Mbororo, are nomadic herders.

### Drivers of forest loss in the Congo Basin

Unfortunately, deforestation in the Congo Basin is on the rise. While in the Amazon, the primary cause of forest loss is large-scale cattle ranching and soybean cultivation, and in Indonesia, it's industrial palm oil production and forestry, the situation is different in the Congo Basin. A 2018 study published in *Science Advances* found that 84 percent of the forest loss in the region between 2000 and 2014 was due to small-scale, non-mechanized farming and clearing



**Chart 1:** Drivers of forest loss in the Congo Basin, 2000–2014  
**Source:** Tyukavina, A. et al. (2018). Congo Basin forest loss dominated by increasing smallholder clearing. *Science Advances*, 4(11). doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aaf2993

Country	Total population (millions)	Population growth rate (annual)	Total fertility rate (live births per woman)	Modern contraceptive prevalence rate *	Unmet need for modern contraception **
Cameroon	28.6	2.6%	4.3	18%	27%
CAR	5.7	2.9%	5.8	18%	31%
Congo	6.1	2.2%	4.0	29%	39%
DRC	102.3	3.2%	6.1	17%	35%
Equatorial Guinea	1.7	2.3%	4.1	15%	34%
Gabon	2.4	2.0%	3.4	28%	34%

**Table 1:** United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). *World Population Prospects: The 2022 Revision*, custom data acquired via website. [population.un.org/wpp/](http://population.un.org/wpp/)

for charcoal production by local communities. Most of this is rotational agriculture, which involves sequentially planting different crops on the same plot of land.

On an individual basis, small-scale agriculture is of course much less destructive than industrial operations, but such a high proportion of people deriving their sustenance and livelihoods directly from the forest, combined with rapid population growth (see Table 1), is threatening the future of the Congo Basin rainforests. In 2023, the total population of the region is approximately 147 million, and this figure is projected to double by 2050, which makes continued deforestation likely. The *Science Advances* authors warn, “Under the assumption that population growth continues to correlate with the increase in annual primary forest loss area, all of DRC’s primary forests will have been cleared by 2100.”

After small-scale agriculture, industrial

logging was found to be the second most important driver of forest loss in the Congo Basin, followed by fires, most of which were presumed to be escaped agricultural fires or fires set for hunting purposes due to their proximity to human activities.

The next most important driver was infrastructure development, including road, residential, and commercial construction, then large-scale clearing for agriculture, responsible for less than 1 percent of the overall forest loss in the Congo Basin, with more than half of this occurring in Cameroon.

Natural disturbance from wind and river meandering was estimated to account for around one-tenth of a percent, and mining was determined to be a relatively rare cause of forest disturbance, driving only 0.04 percent of the total forest loss in the region.

Many of these less significant drivers are expected to become increasingly important under the countries’ push

for economic growth, however. The soils of the Congo Basin are rich in fossil fuels as well as precious minerals, including copper, gold, diamonds, cobalt, uranium, and coltan—naturally, the economic benefits of exploiting these are incredibly tempting. A 2022 assessment by the Forest Declaration Platform found that oil, gas, and mining permits impact up to 48 percent of intact forest landscapes in some countries, including CAR, Congo, DRC, and Gabon. In addition, nearly one-third of the region’s logging concessions overlap with protected areas.

**“Under the assumption that population growth continues to correlate with the increase in annual primary forest loss area, all of DRC’s primary forests will have been cleared by 2100.”**

\* Percentage of women of reproductive age (15-49 years) who are currently using any modern method of contraception

\*\* Percentage of women of reproductive age who want to stop or delay childbearing but are not using a modern method of contraception



The latest *State of the Forests* report by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) found that in 2021, deforestation in the Congo Basin increased by 30,000 hectares (or 4.9 percent) compared to the 2018–20 period, reaching a total of 636,000 hectares. Forest degradation and fragmentation are increasing also, threatening forests' integrity and their ecological processes. Between 2000 and 2016, the share of intact forests in the Basin decreased from 78 percent to 67 percent, representing a degraded area of about 23 million hectares. The report found that in DRC, which holds 60 percent of the entire Congo Basin rainforest area, the current rate of deforestation could result in a 33 percent loss of the country's intact tropical forests by 2050.

The risk of agricultural expansion into forested areas is also particularly high in Cameroon, Congo, DRC, and Gabon because of their high percentage of forest cover and relatively low availability of arable land outside of forested areas.

Climate change, too, will increasingly impact the forest ecosystems through increased drought and fire frequency and severity.

### **Zoonotic disease risk**

Deforestation, forest degradation, and other human activities that harm the Congo Basin's ecosystems (such as extensive hunting and poaching) also pose a significant threat to people due to the risk of disease transmission from wild animals to humans. Between 1996 and 2009, more than half of new infectious diseases emerged in Africa. As humans and their livestock encroach into forests, they come into contact with wild species which sometimes harbor viruses that can pass to humans. The first outbreak of Ebola occurred in DRC (then Zaire) in the 1970s, in a

village near the Ebola River, which gave the virus its name.

Consumption of wild animals (bushmeat), is particularly risky, but in the Congo Basin, bushmeat is an important source of protein and income for many people, and with rapid population growth and increasing household purchasing power, demand for it has been rising.

### **Poor governance and conflict**

Extreme political instability in the Congo Basin exacerbates all of its problems. The current civil strife dates back to the end of the Rwandan genocide in the mid-90s, when fleeing armed groups crossed the border into eastern DRC. Ethnic tensions between groups (which also underpinned the Rwandan genocide and were fueled by the region's brutal colonial past) led to the First and then the Second Congo War, involving several neighboring countries. The Congolese government failed to control the rebels, and despite a peace deal in 2002, extreme violence

perpetrated by armed groups—including indiscriminate killings, mass rape, and abductions—has continued unabated. M23, the most notorious rebel group, which was defeated by the military in 2013, re-emerged in November 2021 and now occupies large parts of DRC's North Kivu province, committing serious human rights violations.

Death toll estimates vary widely but are in the millions, making it the deadliest conflict since World War II. According to the United Nations, DRC had 5.8 million internally displaced people as of March 2023, which makes it the largest internal displacement crisis in Africa. More than a million refugees and asylum seekers have fled DRC to other countries, mostly neighboring Uganda. Efforts to deliver aid are hampered by ongoing violence and lack of funding.

Due to widespread conflict, corruption, and lack of state support, people in DRC have been forced to espouse extreme self-reliance. As noted by the 2018 *Science Advances* study, "In terms of land cover and land use change, self-reliance in response to statelessness is evident in elevated forest disturbance rates compared to other Congo Basin countries, as the entire rural population attempts to eke out a subsistence livelihood."

While overall, the Basin's countries have made progress on establishing legal and institutional frameworks for forest management and protection, their ambition and implementation is insufficient. As in other parts of the world, governments' economic development plans conflict with the need to preserve the environment and





Helene Mamolaya, a member of the Aka tribe, refreshes herself in a river whose level has dropped significantly due to deforestation in Mbata, in the Lobaye region of southwestern CAR, on January 24, 2023. Settled for centuries in the forest which provided for all their needs, Aka people have gradually settled in recent decades in towns and villages where cohabitation with other ethnic groups is difficult. Regularly victims of discrimination, the Akas are relegated to the poorest strata, often in huts made of branches, on the edge of villages. *Barbara Debout/AFP via Getty Images*

protect the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities.

### **Funding shortfalls**

At the 2021 COP26 climate conference in Glasgow, Scotland, a group of 12 donors, including the European Commission, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Bezos Earth Fund, pledged to raise at least \$1.5 billion for Congo Basin forest conservation between 2021 and 2025. An additional \$500 million from 2021 to 2026 was agreed upon through a letter of intent between the Central Africa Forest Initiative and DRC. However, the 2022

Regional Assessment by the Forest Declaration Assessment points out that these financial pledges are rarely accompanied by quantifiable and transparent targets, and they represent only a fraction of what is needed.

Also at COP26, more than 140 countries (including the six Congo Basin nations) committed to ending deforestation and land degradation globally by 2030. Recent funding commitments, however, meet less than 1 percent of the estimated \$460 billion per year needed to protect and restore the world's forests in line with the Paris Agreement's target of limiting global

warming to 1.5°C. There is no estimate for investments needed specifically for the Congo Basin, but as the second largest tropical forest and the largest carbon sink, it will require a significant portion of this sum. An analysis by the Central African Forest Observatory found that, between 2008 and 2017, Central African forests received only around 11 percent of international financial flows for tropical forest conservation.

### **Ensuring the future of the Congo Basin**

Saving the Congo Basin will require a



Members of the Akili Ni Mali association feed fish in Yanonge, 60 km from the city of Kisangani, in the province of Tshopo, in northeastern DRC, on August 31, 2022. Akili Ni Mali was created to meet the primary needs of women who were unemployed and had no other option than to make charcoal or practice agriculture in the region of Yanongo—activities that accelerate deforestation. With the technical support of the Center for International Forestry Research, the women have come together to do other activities that help preserve the environment. *Guerchom Ndebo/AFP via Getty Images*


lot more than just expanding protected areas. Badly designed conservation measures can in fact harm local people, as demonstrated by reported human rights abuses, including physical violence, sexual assault, and threats against Baka tribespeople in Congo perpetrated by park rangers employed to protect the forest. To be effective, fair, and sustainable, forest conservation efforts must benefit local communities. This is of course challenging when such a large and growing number of people obtain all of their food, cooking fuel, building

materials, and income directly from the forest. For this reason, Congo Basin financing must also support efforts to reduce conflict and poverty and to improve access to education and family planning.

To make lasting progress in the Congo Basin, the international community must come together and boost the financial and human resources available to protect the Basin's ecosystems and people.

If we allow the “Lungs of Africa” to atrophy and disappear, our future on

this planet will look bleak indeed. As summarized by the authors of the *State of the Forests 2021* report:

The continuity of the human species depends on the sustainable management of these rather fragile ecosystems. The fate of the Congo Basin forests must therefore be viewed as a joint responsibility of the Central African countries and of the international community, which have all for long benefited from these forests and placed their hopes in them for a secure future and a shared well-being. 



# VIRTUAL EVENTS

## It's Never Too Late to Join Us Online!

By Natalie Widel, Director of Digital Marketing

If you haven't checked out the array of virtual events Population Connection regularly hosts, you're missing out! Over the last few months, hundreds of members and supporters have joined us for:

### Five events featuring Global Partners

Representatives from Rural Women's Development and Unity Center in Nepal, Nashipai Maasai Community Projects in Kenya, Nasaruni Academy in Kenya, Conservation Through Public Health in Uganda, and Lemur Love in Madagascar have shared insights into their unique organizations and how their partnerships with Population Connection are helping to support their efforts.

### Two Page Turners meetings


In February, book club members gathered to discuss *The Turnaway Study: Ten Years, a Thousand Women, and the Consequences of Having—or Being Denied—an Abortion* by Diana Greene Foster. In May, we read the new memoir by Dr. Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka (Founder and Executive Director of Conservation Through Public Health and Population Connection board member), *Walking With Gorillas: The Journey of an African Wildlife Vet*.

Join us for our next meeting in August for an interesting and lively discussion with other Population Connection members (book selection to be determined)! You can find more information at [popconnect.org/virtual-events/book-club/](https://popconnect.org/virtual-events/book-club/).

### Earth Day event with President and CEO John Seager

John's presentation, "Whose Planet Is It, Anyway? Earth Day Challenges for a Crowded World," explored how the rapid population growth

of the last half-century has had devastating impacts on people and our natural world. John argued that though talking about overpopulation remains taboo in many circles, we can't bet the future of our living planet on technical solutions alone.

It's never too late to see what's happening next! Find recordings of past events (including most of those mentioned above) and register to join us in the coming months at [popconnect.org/virtual-events](https://popconnect.org/virtual-events). We look forward to seeing you! 

Do you love to take photos on your travels or in your own community? If so, we'd love to see them! Submit your photos of the people, places, and wildlife you're most passionate about protecting, and see your winning image in the September issue of *Population Connection* magazine! Upload your entry by July 11, World Population Day, for consideration.

See guidelines and instructions at

[popconnect.org/virtual-events/summer-photo-contest](https://popconnect.org/virtual-events/summer-photo-contest)



Last year's winning photo by Andrew Clark of a sleeping Red-crowned Barbet in Borneo

## Proactive Efforts to Protect Reproductive Freedom

By Brian Dixon, Senior Vice President for Governmental and Political Affairs

### Members of Congress call for increased support for global family planning

Both the House and Senate have begun the process of determining federal funding priorities for Fiscal Year 2024, which begins on October 1, 2023. In preparation for these deliberations, 125 members of the U.S. House sent a letter to Appropriations Committee leaders making the case for international family planning funding and policies. Led by Reps. Diana DeGette (D-CO) and Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), the letter asks for an investment of \$1.74 billion for family planning programs in aid-recipient countries. This figure represents the U.S. share of global support necessary to help the 218 million women in the developing world who want to prevent or delay pregnancy but have an unmet need for contraceptives.

The letter also calls for a provision to prevent a future president from reimposing the Global Gag Rule, for the prioritization of support for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and its work to provide crucial services in more than 150

countries, and for the elimination of the Helms Amendment which has been used to deny overseas aid for safe, legal abortion care under any circumstances for 50 years.

A similar letter to Senate Appropriations leaders was signed by 37 senators. Led by Sens. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Chris Murphy (D-CT), this letter urges funding for family planning programs of no less than \$820 million—an increase of \$212.5 million from the stagnant level of the last several years. The Senate letter also urges a provision to prevent a future imposition of the Global Gag Rule as well as robust support for UNFPA.

### Global HER Act reintroduced

In late March, the Global Health, Empowerment, and Rights (HER) Act, a bill to prevent a future president from reimposing the Global Gag Rule, was introduced in both houses of Congress. Led by Reps. Barbara Lee (D-CA), Ami Bera (D-CA), and Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) in the House and Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) in the Senate, the legislation has garnered strong support.

When introducing the House bill, Rep. Lee said:

This bill is about more than health: It is a guarantee that American foreign assistance dollars will never be weaponized as a tool of oppression. It is about ensuring women in communities around the world can write their own stories and determine their own futures.

Sen. Shaheen commented, when introducing the Senate bill:

The Global Gag Rule has had detrimental effects on the ability of women around the world to access important health services and reproductive care. What's more, health centers impacted by the Global Gag Rule are often the only providers women and their families have access to in vulnerable parts of the world, which further exacerbates access to comprehensive family health care services for already at-risk populations. While President Biden rescinded this harmful policy, Congress must act to ensure it can never be implemented again by a future administration.



The Global HER Act (H.R.1838, S.1098) currently has 162 cosponsors in the House and 50 in the Senate.

## Bill repealing Helms Amendment reintroduced

Originally passed in 1973 as a response to the *Roe v. Wade* decision, the Helms Amendment bars the use of foreign assistance funding to pay for “abortion as a method of family planning.”

This funding limitation has, since its adoption, been enforced as an outright ban on abortion under any circumstances. It has undermined public health and undercut human rights around the world. It is bad health policy. It is bad foreign policy. It’s a relic of U.S. antiabortion politics that is utterly disconnected from the reality of the lives of the people it affects.

On March 22, the Abortion Is Health Care Everywhere Act was introduced in the House and Senate by Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) and Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ), respectively. This legislation will repeal the Helms Amendment and create a new standard of

U.S. support for comprehensive reproductive health care services as part of its global health funding.

When she introduced the bill, Rep. Schakowsky (D-IL) said:

For nearly 50 years, the racist, harmful Helms Amendment has barred U.S. foreign assistance from being used to offer abortion care, even in countries where abortions are legal. The United States should not stand in the way of health care and bodily autonomy in other countries. Developing countries bear the burden of 97 percent of all unsafe abortions. We must protect women’s health around the globe. By singling out abortion as a restricted health service, the Helms Amendment reinforces efforts to criminalize abortion and heightens abortion-related stigma.

In each of the last two years, the House Appropriations Committee has deleted the Helms Amendment from the annual State Department and Foreign Operations spending bill, but it was added back in both times before the bills became law.


The Abortion Is Health Care

Everywhere Act (H.R.1723, S.929) currently has 156 cosponsors in the House and 24 in the Senate.

## Democratic governors form coalition to protect abortion access

In response to the Supreme Court’s decision to eliminate the federal right to abortion and resulting efforts to ban abortion in states across the country, 21 governors, all Democrats, have joined together to protect access to care.

More than 170 million people live in the states included in the Reproductive Freedom Alliance. The states making up the Alliance include solidly Democratic bastions like California and New York, but also include swing states such as Michigan, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania.

In a joint statement, the Alliance wrote, “As governors representing more than 170 million people across every region of the country, we are standing with all people who believe in reproductive freedom and health care. We are standing with them to say, *enough.*” 

# FIELD + OUTREACH

## Capitol Hill Days 2023

By Rebecca Harrington, Senior Director of Advocacy and Outreach

After a year that's seen endless assaults on reproductive rights here in the United States, we gathered (online) for our annual Capitol Hill Days advocacy event from April 5–7 to learn about what's happening with reproductive health and rights around the world.

We were joined for a trivia-game-style opening session by several colleagues from East Africa and South America in an engaging conversation that touched on family planning, conservation, and youth engagement.

**Melvine Ouyo**, Population Connection board member and Founder and Executive Director of Hope for Kenya Slum Adolescents Initiative, talked about the far-reaching negative consequences of Donald Trump's Global Gag Rule, which included the closure of clinics that provided family planning services, testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections and reproductive cancers, and treatment of tropical diseases.

**Dickson Okong'o**, Founder and Executive Director of Stretchers Youth Organization in Kenya,

discussed the vital importance of providing youth with information, whether through community talking boxes, where people can leave anonymous questions to be answered, or through their Adolescent and Youth Empowerment for Health Advocacy Project, where staff discuss sexuality, life skills, and making informed decisions with young people. Stretchers also focuses on good governance as one of its three thematic areas, impressing upon young people that “each and every right comes with a responsibility,” instilling in them a commitment to democracy and empowering them to be in control of their reproductive health.

**Cuthbert Maendaenda**, Executive Director of Tanzania Men as Equal Partners in Development, talked about his organization's work to bring men into the conversation about family planning and to make them “agents of change” among other men. Participating men are effectively altering cultural norms in their own communities and changing people's expectations around family planning—for example, that only men (and not women) will carry and have condoms available.


**Sara Lara**, Founder and Executive Director of Women for Conservation in Colombia, discussed how women are deeply impacted by natural disasters and how it's therefore “crucial” for them to be involved in efforts to protect the environment.

**Congresswoman Susan Wild** (D-PA-7) joined us for a keynote talk where she discussed everyone's fundamental right to control their own reproductive life and the importance of sticking with the fight for reproductive rights even when things are dire, as they certainly are these days. Rep. Wild is a strong supporter of both international and domestic family planning and reproductive rights, signing on as a cosponsor of the Global HER Act, which would serve as a permanent legislative repeal of the Global Gag Rule, and as an original cosponsor of the Women's Health Protection Act, which would protect the right to abortion here in the U.S.

After receiving training from Population Connection staff, our activists took to Zoom to meet with the staffs of strong supporters of



international family planning and reproductive rights such as Sens. Michael Bennet (D-CO), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Mark Kelly (D-AZ), and Peter Welch (D-VT). Our activists were encouraged by their meetings and enjoyed the opportunity to connect with the offices of their elected officials.

As always, we were inspired by the enthusiasm and commitment of our supporters and activists, and look forward to continuing to work with them to fight for reproductive health and rights for everyone around the world. 

**Zoom screenshots, from top:**

Melvine Ouyo, Population Connection board member and Founder and Executive Director of Hope for Kenya Slum Adolescents Initiative

Sara Lara, Founder and Executive Director of Women for Conservation in Colombia

Dickson Okong’o, Executive Director of Stretchers Youth Organization in Kenya

Cuthbert Maendaenda, Executive Director of Tanzania Men as Equal Partners in Development

Congresswoman Susan Wild (D-PA-7)

**When women and girls are supported, their communities thrive, whether it is globally or here in the United States. And so that’s why I think the work that you are all doing with Population Connection, and each of you who are advocates in training, is so incredibly important. As a member of Congress, I can assure you that coordinated and thoughtful and relentless advocacy actually does make a difference.**

**– Rep. Susan Wild (D-PA-7)**

# POPULATION EDUCATION

## Viewing the World Through a Lens of 8 Billion

By Maria Seitz, Student Engagement Fellow

### Winners of the 2022–2023 *World of 8 Billion* Student Video Contest Announced

This year, we officially changed the name of our student video contest from *World of 7 Billion* to *World of 8 Billion* to reflect the world population hitting 8 billion in November 2022. The name change came with a newly designed website ([worldof8billion.org](http://worldof8billion.org)).


Each year, we select three new global challenges for students to tackle. This year's topics were climate change, gender equality, and waste. Students were asked to make a 60-second video that explains one of the global challenges and how it connects to a growing population. They were also tasked with identifying a sustainable solution to the challenge addressed in their chosen topic.

For the 2022–2023 school year, the contest's 12th year, approximately 4,800 students from 47 states and territories and 45 countries created over 3,100 videos!

In order to help the students create their videos, we developed a brand new project organizer that guides them step-by-step through the video making process. We also provided

filmmaking tips, background research and readings, and a judging rubric. For teachers, we included classroom lessons to set students' foundation for the video topics.

Videos were initially judged by the Population Education staff to narrow the field of finalist entries sent to our panel of 56 esteemed judges consisting of educators, business owners, journalists, filmmakers, and topic experts. The judges then scored the finalists to determine our 18 winning videos. High school winners received \$1,200 for first place, \$600 for second place, and \$300 for an honorable mention. Middle school winners received \$600 for first place and \$300 for second place.

We were truly blown away by the quality of content and creativity we saw in the videos this year. The students' ingenuity and thoughtfulness in addressing their chosen problems, such as greenhouse gases, electronic waste, and education inequality were inspiring. View this year's winners at [worldof8billion.org/winners-2023!](http://worldof8billion.org/winners-2023!) 

#### High School Honorable Mentions

##### *Setting a Cap to Climate Change*

Ryan Lee, Grade 11  
Issaquah High School  
Issaquah, Washington

##### *Mass Transit: The Express Train to Sustainability*

Roberto Quesada, Grade 12  
Brooklyn Technical High School  
Brooklyn, New York

##### *Women With Water*

Tammy Nguyen and Ella Stack,  
Grade 10  
Loyola Sacred Heart High School  
Missoula, Montana

##### *Girls Can Learn Too*

Bisola Akintunde, Grade 9  
Crestwood School  
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

##### *Composting: Build Your Solution to Food Waste*

Yoonseo Kim and Hyunseo Kim, Grade 10  
Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy  
Aurora, Illinois

##### *Look Up to Feeding 8 Billion*

Grace Puma, Grade 11  
Princess Anne High School  
Virginia Beach, Virginia



# CLIMATE CHANGE

1

## 1st Place, High School



### **Better Batteries for a Better Future**

**Sophia Rico, Grade 10**  
Legacy of Educational Excellence High School  
San Antonio, Texas

Sophia has always been interested in how battery technology could help

reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change and was surprised, when researching for the contest, that there weren't many articles on the topic. She is interested in continuing to learn about how aluminum ion batteries can mitigate climate change. Sophia plans to become an electrical or materials engineer in the future.

2

## 2nd Place, High School



### **Reducing Emissions With Direct Air Capture**

**Arnav Bali, Grade 9**  
South River High School  
Edgewater, Maryland

Arnav is a three-time winner of our student video contest

and continues to participate because he enjoys the challenge. It also provides him with an opportunity to showcase his new ideas and filming techniques. He shared that "climate change impacts all of us, and its solutions require a lot of resources, which is a great way to bring us together."

1

## 1st Place, Middle School



### **Earth's Fate on Your Plate**

**Eera Deshpande, Grade 8**  
Hidden Oaks Middle School  
Prior Lake, Minnesota

Eera focused her video on the connections between raising livestock and climate change, in part because of the book *Eat for the*

*Planet*, which she read last year. Eera was stunned to find out how much more water and land are needed to grow livestock than the amount of water and land needed to grow vegetables. She really enjoyed the "learning along the way aspect" of this project and looking back on how far she's come since she first started it.

2

## 2nd Place, Middle School



### **Monitoring Climate Injustice**

**Jade Lan, Grade 6**  
Coleytown Middle School  
Westport, Connecticut

Jade decided to participate in the contest after one of her teachers encouraged all of the 7th graders at her school to create a video.

She was interested in producing a video on climate change because she knew it was shaping our world significantly. After reading a *New York Times* article about a young Houston family losing their home to a weather-related natural disaster, Jade made the decision to focus her video on environmental justice.

# GENDER EQUALITY

1

## 1st Place, High School



### **Close the Gap: Gender Inequality and Labor**

**Maria Aurelio, Grade 12**  
Olympia High School  
Olympia, Washington

Maria knew a little bit about how population and

gender equality intersected before creating her video, but she really valued the learning opportunities presented by this experience. As someone planning on going into the health care field, and as an active member of her high school's equity team, Maria is always interested in learning more about how different fields intersect with one another.

2

## 2nd Place, High School



### **Call the Shots on Menstrual Inequality**

**Arianna Prado Calvo, Jimena Chacón González, and María Fernanda Zeballos Llerena, Grade 9**  
Golden Valley School  
San Isidro, Heredia, Costa Rica

Arianna, Jimena, and María were interested in gender equality because of a bill introduced in the Costa Rican legislative assembly to reduce the tax on feminine hygiene products. They said that the current tax is hard for many Costa Ricans to afford, and they wanted to shine a light on the issue. The three friends are working on a plan with their social responsibility committee at school to stay involved.

1

## 1st Place, Middle School



### **Child Marriage**

**Alice Feng and Eva Chen, Grade 8**  
Eastside Preparatory School  
Kirkland, Washington

Alice and Eva saw everyone in their class choosing the other contest topics and

seized the opportunity to make their video stand out, while learning about the ties between gender equality and population. Through their research, the subtopic of child marriage kept recurring. They felt moved to talk about it and the inequality women face that leads to them having more children. Their original artwork illustrates the role education can play breaking this cycle of gender inequality.

2

## 2nd Place, Middle School



### **Reproductive Rights**

**Adelaide Hobor and Hazel Boerger, Grade 7**  
South Orange Middle School  
South Orange, New Jersey

Addy and Hazel were interested in gender equality because it was the most relevant to their lives. They

didn't realize just how much it overlapped with the topic of population growth! All of the recent events happening in the U.S. surrounding women's reproductive rights inspired them to make a video on the topic. This was their first time making a video, and they found the process to be challenging but fun.

# WASTE

1

1st Place, High School

## Creating a Circular Food Industry

Lara Orlandi, Grade 11  
St. Paul's Girls' School  
London, England, United Kingdom



Lara had an overall picture of the social and environmental impacts of population

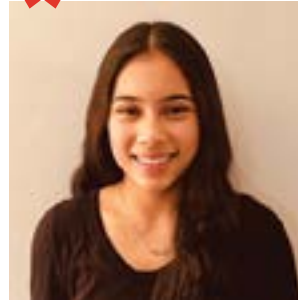
growth but didn't know how population growth related to food waste in particular. When talking about the research for creating her video, she said, "It made me more hopeful by watching other people's solutions about how to mitigate challenges and create solutions to impact the future."

2

2nd Place, High School

## Our Fashion Footprint

Stella Abarca, Grade 10  
Plainfield East High School  
Plainfield, Illinois



Stella used clothing to create visuals in this powerful, stop-motion video that emphasizes ways to reduce our clothing consumption.

She has always been interested in population growth and its impacts and was "shocked to learn about the impact of fast fashion because it is often underestimated." Stella wanted to create a video to help educate people on alternatives.

1

1st Place, Middle School

## E-waste: a Golden Opportunity

Surya Arunkumar, Grade 8  
Pearson Ranch Middle School  
Austin, Texas



Surya saw clear ties between population growth and increasing electronic waste.

He felt that a lot of attention is given to technology's negative impacts on our mental health but not to the consequences our devices have on our physical health through the toxins e-waste releases into the air, water, and soil. Surya found that there was a clear need for a safe way to extract valuable resources from e-waste, as the current methods of extraction cause a lot of harm to people.

2

2nd Place, Middle School

## E-waste: the Growing Problem and Solutions for a Sustainable Future

Benjamin Kurian, Grade 7  
Olentangy Liberty Middle School  
Powell, Ohio



This is the second year that Ben has placed in our student video contest. He participated again because he really loved the process of creating a video. "It was fun, especially editing and filming." He was drawn to the topic of e-waste because the majority is not recycled properly, and it is a challenge that will continue to grow with an increasing population.

# GLOBAL PARTNERS

## Girl Up Initiative Uganda

Girl Up Initiative Uganda advances educational and economic opportunities for women and girls in central and eastern Uganda. The organization, led by Executive Director and Co-Founder Monica Nyiraguhabwa, inspires girls to be leaders so they can make a powerful impact on their families and communities. Lee S. Polansky, Senior Director of Executive Initiatives and Special Projects, spoke with a few of the girls who participate in Girl Up's programs.

Girl Up Initiative Uganda (GUIU) was founded in 2012 by Monica Nyiraguhabwa, a young Ugandan woman who grew up in the urban slums of Kampala, and Kimberly Wolf, a young American woman passionate about girls' rights and leadership. GUIU's mission is to build a vibrant movement of girls and young women through transformative leadership, sexual and reproductive health education, and skills development.

Monica and Kimberly dreamed up the idea of Girl Up after visiting Monica's community together and identifying the need to advance educational and economic opportunities for young women and adolescent girls in slum areas. Girls and women in Uganda face many obstacles, including lack of educational opportunities and high

rates of child marriage, gender-based violence, and teen pregnancy.

Through the organization's comprehensive programs, GUIU offers trainings and mentorships to

help girls gain confidence, as well as vocational and leadership skills. The team also delivers sex education and provides sexual and reproductive health services. In addition, GUIU's critical work to engage boys and challenge harmful gender norms helps fight gender-based violence.

From its humble beginnings, Girl Up Initiative Uganda is now a thriving, respected, and growing organization for adolescent girls.



Peer educators and college campus ambassadors participate in a health service camp at Kyambogo University. *Girl Up Initiative Uganda*





## Aisha, 18

I live with my parents, and I'm the second of two brothers and three sisters. When Girl Up visited my high school, I joined the Champions of Change program. My experience has been so exciting, learning things I didn't know as a girl and building my confidence. I have opportunities to speak out, especially as a member of the Girl Advisory Council, and I enjoy the freedom of expression. What I like best about Girl Up has been learning about sexual and reproductive health and the changes in my body, and understanding that everyone is best the way they are.

When I am not in Girl Up, I study biology, chemistry, math, and computers. I enjoy being at home with my parents and siblings. It also keeps me away from the violence in my community. At school, I connect with friends—studying helps us attain what we want in life.



## Pauline, 18

I'm in secondary school studying biology, chemistry, math, and computers. I am the youngest of six, and a twin. I joined Girl Up at my friends' urging. Learning about peer pressure and communication skills was useful, since girls here grow up with considerable peer pressure. I learned to communicate my feelings openly and respectfully, and to distinguish good and bad peer pressure. Girl Up taught me about my rights, my body, and my society and how to contribute to it. The coaches are supportive and informed.

I study when I am not in Girl Up. Education is the only direct pathway for me to become what I want to be in the future, a neurosurgeon. I encourage every girl to use every opportunity. Nothing is impossible if you set your mind to it.



## Latifah, 17

My mother couldn't pay for my schooling, so Girl Up invested in my education. I'm thankful to Coach Monica for the gift of education. I live with my mum, stepfather, and four sisters. I'm the third born, and the only family member with a secondary education, a great achievement.

I was in primary school when I learned Girl Up taught life skills. My English teacher knew my situation and encouraged me to join. I learned to be assertive about my body's changes and about myself. Girl Up gave me direction. I represent other girls on the Girls Advisory Council. I know I can do a lot for my society. When I'm not with Girl Up, I'm in school or at home, preparing for my future.



## EDITORIAL EXCERPTS

### The Washington Post

Washington, DC

The Supreme Court said late Friday that the abortion pill mifepristone—a drug millions of women have used to terminate early pregnancies—would remain widely available, at least for now.

The news is more cause for relief than celebration, and certainly not cause for complacency. True, a court with a conservative supermajority that overturned *Roe v. Wade* last year issued a stay on lower court rulings that would have upset the status quo, allowing abortion providers to continue distributing a safe drug. But the legal challenges to mifepristone will carry on as lower courts continue wrangling over the challenge to the Food and Drug Administration's approval of the drug, and the case could appear before the Supreme Court again before long. The fate of reproductive rights in the United States remains in the balance—and even more. Depending on how the courts handle the case, access to all kinds of treatments could be in jeopardy.

...

The Biden administration was right to call the lower court's decision an unprecedented attack not only on women's health care but also on the authority and expertise of the FDA, whose approval of mifepristone relied on data from numerous clinical trials. In recent years, the conservative legal movement has targeted multiple facets of the administrative state, and the attack on the FDA is no exception: If the Supreme Court agreed with Judge Kacsmaryk, the FDA's regulatory authority over other drugs would be called into question.

Though the justices have avoided this mistake, for the moment, Friday's decision nevertheless underscores how crucial, and vulnerable, access to reproductive care remains.

April 22, 2023

### The Telegraph

Kolkata, India

... Rapid population growth makes eradicating poverty, combating hunger and malnutrition, and widening the coverage of health and education systems daunting challenges. Little wonder then that India's performance on each of these crucial parameters leaves a lot to be desired. Worse, the burden is, in reality, double: populous India is also having to contend with the specter of climate change. Resources like food and water—820 million Indians are estimated to be water-stressed at present—that are already strained on account of extreme weather events will be made scarcer by the teeming numbers. Additionally, climate change is set to displace more people and leave greater areas arid and [un]inhabitable.

The silver lining is that India's population surge is stabilizing, with its total fertility rate ... falling to 2.0, which is below the replacement level. India's policies of deepening public access to health care systems and enhancing family planning services are delivering: these need to be invested in and broadened. Mischievous political narratives blaming Muslims for India's population burden must also be resisted as they fly in the face of facts ... Other constituencies are forced to bear similar disproportionate shares of the blame. The poor are the favorite punching bag of policy and public discourse, deflecting attention from the government's inability to eradicate poverty. Women, too, are blamed, even though female sterilization constitutes 75 percent of modern contraceptive methods used in India; the corresponding figure for men is a little over 12 percent. This only goes to show that the battle against population is layered and ought to be fought in tandem with institutional efforts to reduce poverty and heighten the agency of women.

...

April 23, 2023

# CARTOON



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- Establish a Charitable Gift Annuity to receive payments for life that will never change, no matter how long you live or whether the stock market fluctuates.



Our invaluable members enable Population Connection to provide life-changing support to our Global Partners. This photo shows some of the women who benefit from Women for Conservation, our Global Partner in rural Colombia.

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