



ISSUE BRIEF

Population, Abortion, and Food

By Rob Schwarzwalder

Executive Summary

Global overpopulation and food scarcities are myths, yet these myths are received as fact by far too many people. They also are used by advocates of population control¹ as pretexts for coercive or incentivized abortion-on-demand, sterilization, and widespread distribution of oral contraceptives.² In this paper, the author argues that neither overpopulation nor shortages of food are the problems their proponents claim them to be and thus should not be used to advance anti-natalist policies, particularly in the developing world.

Introduction

A couple of years ago, I wrote that those who contend for a less-populated world due to food shortages are wrong.³ The data indicate that there are, and will remain, ample food resources for an ever-growing human population for as far as realistically we can project.

Instead, the issues related to food shortages involve government corruption and the use of food as a political instrument,⁴ dramatic improvements in the distribution of food resources,⁵ increased crop yields, continued hybridization of grains, and prudent genetic modification of plant organisms,⁶ reducing the quantity of wasted food,⁷ and similar things. Justice, infrastructure, culture, care of creation, and agricultural science are the integrating factors.

These efforts are complex. No one should be blithe about the ability of the world to produce adequate supplies of nutritious food. However, the data indicate that our ability to provide life-sustaining food for projected populations for decades to come is only growing. Advances in agriculture are such that this assertion is held widely in the academic and scientific communities that follow these issues.

Overpopulation as a Pretext for Abortion and Sterilization

Yet in our time, the myth of overpopulation retains its hold on the international public and governmental imaginations. For example, hundreds of millions of unborn children have been aborted in the name of population control. According to Ben Johnson in LifeSiteNews, “China, which boasts of preventing 400 million births since instituting (its) coercive population control policy in 1979, continues to forcibly sterilize women who have had one child (or in rare cases, two), and to abort any children beyond the government-prescribed limit, in defiance of international human rights norms.”⁸

Or consider India: According to recent report by CNN:⁹

Decades of sex-selective abortion have created an acute lack of women in certain parts of India. Traffickers capitalize on the shortage by recruiting or kidnapping women

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ensnared in poverty to sell as brides. It's a cycle influenced by poverty and medical technologies, but one that ultimately is perpetuated by India's attitude towards women ... The skewed sex ratio is due to what Puneet Bedi, a Delhi suburb gynecologist, calls "mass murder on an unprecedented scale." Census data shows some districts in India have fewer than 800 girls born for every 1,000 boys, leaving male-heavy villages.

Coercive abortion and sterilization are profound moral wrongs. Their evil is profound and is only magnified by the specious character of their supposed justification (the myth of overpopulation).

In places like the United States, where abortion-on-demand is rampant and almost always elective, Family Research Council's Marriage and Religion Research Institute has shown that the resultant demographic crisis¹⁰ means substantially less economic growth for decades to come.¹¹ As David Brooks has written in the *New York Times*,¹² "For decades, people took dynamism and economic growth for granted and saw population growth as a problem. Now we've gone to the other extreme, and it's clear that young people are the scarce resource. In the 21st century, the U.S. could be the slowly aging leader of a rapidly aging world."

An Aging Population Plus Fewer Children = Shrinking Economic Growth

Additionally, an aging population globally has haunting implications for economic growth and human sustainability. Researchers at the University of Madrid (Spain)¹³ are predicting that using "a model based on global population data spanning the years from 1900 to 2010 ... the opposite of what Doomsday Prophets of the 1960s and beyond insisted would happen - the number of people on Earth will stabilize around the middle of the century and perhaps even start to decline." They note that "As recently as 1992 it was predicted that there would be 7.17 billion people on Earth by 2010 instead of the actual 6.8 billion. In fact, the fertility rate has fallen by more than 40 percent since 1950."

One of the great ironies of modern thought is that anti-natalist policies (abortion on demand, coercive sterilization, ready access to cheap or free oral contraceptives, etc.) exist, in part, to combat a problem that doesn't exist: Overpopulation. In a recent study, Deutsche Bank demographer Sanjeev Sanyal¹⁴ estimates that United Nations population projections could be too high by nearly 26 percent; analyst James Pethokoukis of the American Enterprise Institute calls this "the missing three billion" (people). As science writer Jeff Wise, author of *Extreme Fear: The Science of Your Mind in Danger*, wrote in 2013 in *Slate*:¹⁵

... the rate of global population growth has slowed. And it's expected to keep slowing. Indeed, according to experts' best estimates, the total population of Earth will stop growing within the lifespan of people alive today. And then it will fall.

This is a counterintuitive notion in the United States, where we've heard often and loudly that world population growth is a perilous and perhaps unavoidable threat to our future as a species. But population decline is a very familiar concept in the rest of the developed world, where fertility has long since fallen far below the 2.1 live births per woman required to maintain population equilibrium ... The way things are going, Western Europe as a whole will most likely shrink from 460 million to just 350 million

by the end of the century. That's not so bad compared with Russia and China, each of whose populations could fall by half.

Wise closes his piece with a somber rumination about the future:

If humanity is going to sustain itself, then the number of couples deciding to have three or four kids will consistently have to exceed the number opting to raise one or zero. The 2.0 that my wife and I have settled for is a decent effort, but we're not quite pulling our weight. Are we being selfish? Or merely rational? Our decision is one that I'm sure future generations will judge us on. Assuming there are any.

It is noteworthy that in developed nations, radical declines in population largely have not been enlivened by conscientious concerns with overpopulation. Indeed, worry about there being too many people has been, at best, a modest reason for the elision of procreation from sexual intimacy. Instead, radical sexual autonomy as a supreme good has displaced not only procreation but even relationship from such intimacy. Yet the result is the same as indicated above: dramatic declines in population in Western nations.

What to do? An obvious solution: Encourage married couples, here and everywhere, to have at least three children. People are the greatest of all resources, one that merits not only protection but replenishment. Increases in the number of people and agriculture science, abetted by political liberty and stability, only will enhance economic growth, and adequate food supplies.

In the developing world, much depends on quality pre-natal and maternal health care and both political stability and liberty. Last year, the respected theologian Dr. Wayne Grudem spoke at FRC about his book *The Poverty of Nations*,¹⁶ written in concert with economist Dr. Barry Asmus. The goal of the book is to provide "a sustainable solution to poverty in the poor nations of the world, a solution based on both economic history and the teachings of the Bible." For practical and theologically sound ideas about how to remediate global poverty, it's a great place to start (and from which to act).

Abortion, Population and Food

We have enough food to feed everyone sufficiently and, barring something both catastrophic and unforeseen, we will continue to have ample food supplies for the entire global population. As noted previously, political institutions, distribution capacities, land use, pollution, GMO foods and so forth demand continuous evaluation and improvement.

However, one thing is clear: Advocates of abortion-on-demand, mandatory or incentivized sterilization, and virtually indiscriminate distribution of oral contraceptives are basing their advocacy not on science-based concerns with over-population but fear-driven ideology and, in many cases, profit (as an example of this last point, see "1,000 Percent Profit Spurs Illegal Sale of Abortion Pills,"¹⁷ *Times of India*, August 10, 2012). To these ends, countless women in the developing world are victimized.

Food: Abundant, Now and in the Future

Following is a list of quotes concerning food and population. Of course, the authors propose a diverse set of solutions, not all of which reflect sound judgment. However, the bottom line is

that there exists the capacity to feed an increasingly populated world well for the indefinite future. Whether countries around the world embrace this truth and act upon it is another matter.

"Food: There's Lots of It," Overpopulationisamyth.com

Both of the world's leading authorities on food distribution (the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO] and the World Food Programme [WFP]) are very clear: there is more than enough food for everyone on the planet. The FAO neatly summarizes the problem of starvation, saying that "the world currently produces enough food for everybody, but many people do not have access to it." Food is a lot like money: just because some people have none doesn't mean that there isn't enough of it--it's just spread unevenly.¹⁸

Mark Bittman, "How to Feed the World," New York Times, October 20, 2013

The world has long produced enough calories, around 2,700 per day per human, more than enough to meet the United Nations projection of a population of nine billion in 2050, up from the current seven billion. There are hungry people not because food is lacking, but because not all of those calories go to feed humans (a third go to feed animals, nearly 5 percent are used to produce biofuels, and as much as a third is wasted, all along the food chain).¹⁹

Eric Holt Gimenez, "We Already Grow Enough Food For 10 Billion People -- and Still Can't End Hunger," Huffington Post, May 2, 2012

Hunger is caused by poverty and inequality, not scarcity. For the past two decades, the rate of global food production has increased faster than the rate of global population growth. The world already produces more than 1 ½ times enough food to feed everyone on the planet. That's enough to feed 10 billion people, the population peak we expect by 2050. But the people making less than \$2 a day -- most of whom are resource-poor farmers cultivating unviable small plots of land -- can't afford to buy this food.²⁰

World Hunger Education Service, 2014 World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics

The world produces enough food to feed everyone. World agriculture produces 17 percent more calories per person today than it did 30 years ago, despite a 70 percent population increase. This is enough to provide everyone in the world with at least 2,720 kilocalories (kcal) per person per day according to the most recent estimate that we could find. The principal problem is that many people in the world do not have sufficient land to grow, or income to purchase, enough food.²¹

"Feeding the World: How Much is Enough?" The Economist, February 24, 2011

Allowing for all the food that could be eaten but is turned into biofuels, and the staggering amounts wasted on the way, farmers are already producing much more than is required -- more than twice the minimum nutritional needs by some measures. If there is a food problem, it does not look like a technical or biological one.²²

Mark Koba, "A hungry world: Lots of food, in too few places," CNBC, July 22, 2013

"We don't have food shortage problem," said Emelie Peine, a professor of international politics and economy at the University of Puget Sound. "What we have is a distribution

problem and an income problem," Peine said. "People aren't getting the food ... and even if [they] did, they don't have enough money to buy it."²³

United Nations Briefing Papers on Food: "Hunger"

The greatest scandal of our age is the fact that just under 1 billion people on the planet go to bed hungry every night. This is despite the fact that we produce more than enough to feed every single person in the world. The problem is not a shortage but rather that the undernourished who need food most cannot access it.²⁴

David Biello, "Will Organic Food Fail to Feed the World?" Scientific American, April 25, 2012

... the world already produces 22 trillion calories annually via agriculture, enough to provide more than 3,000 calories to every person on the planet. The food problem is one of distribution and waste—whether the latter is food spoilage during harvest, in storage or even after purchase. According to the Grocery Manufacturers Association, in the U.S. alone, 215 meals per person go to waste annually. "Since the world already produces more than enough food to feed everyone well, there are other important considerations" besides yield, argues ecologist Catherine Badgley of the University of Michigan.²⁵

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¹ Anne Roback Morse and Steven W. Mosher, "Debunking the Myth of Overpopulation," Population Research Institute, September 30, 2013, accessed January 7, 2015, <http://pop.org/content/debunking-myth-overpopulation>.

² "Our work," International Planned Parenthood Federation, accessed January 7, 2015, <http://www.ippf.org/our-work>.

³ Rob Schwarzwalder, "Hunger, Plenty, and Population," Family Research Council, accessed January 7, 2015, <http://www.frc.org/issuebrief/hunger-plenty-and-population>.

⁴ "Corruption leading to unequal access, use and distribution of land – UN report," December 12, 2011, accessed on January 7, 2015, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=40698#.VK2rhzHF9Ch>;

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⁵ Jaclyn Tan, "Global Food Scarcity: Definition, Distribution, Roadblocks," Strategic Discussions for Nebraska, University of Nebraska - Lincoln, accessed January 7, 2015, <http://sdn.unl.edu/global-food-scarcity>:

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- ¹⁷ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/1000-profit-spurs-illegal-sale-of-abortion-pills/articleshow/15428098.cms>
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