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Send response to  
journal:

Re: [In all countries,  
family planning has  
relevance to food  
security and minimising  
climate change](#)

The obstacles to food availability that Mark Perthroth lists are all relevant - and there are more, eg the global trend to meat-eating and the diversion of cropland to biofuels. All must be addressed. But they are additional to the fundamental mismatch on this finite planet between unremitting growth of human numbers and available fresh water, cropland and fisheries. Welcome but unsustainable improvements in agricultural yields (totally dependent as they were on cheap fossil fuel energy) meant it took a little longer than Malthus expected to demonstrate the correctness of his much maligned mathematical model: a very little longer, given that 210 years is 0.02%, a mere blip in the time since humankind initiated agriculture.

Which of our words “doctors .... should advocate for it (family planning) to be supplied only wisely and compassionately” or “We must not put pressure on people” support either Taiyyab Mehmood’s comment about getting rid of pensioners or Mark Perthroth’s accusation that we favour contraception being offered more “aggressively” –anywhere, whether in the UK or USA or in resource poor settings? What is obvious is that everywhere, one less birth is one less person to trash the planet: which is what modern humans inevitably do in varying degrees. As we pointed out, people in high resource countries do this far more than the poor are able to, so the climate change impact of one less rich child is greater. But the ever-increasing numbers of low-consumers aspire (as is their right) to exit their poverty. Anyone with a passionate desire (which we hope Mark and Taiyyab share) to abolish poverty, must understand that one less person born into poverty is one less person either to suffer poverty or to produce more greenhouse gases while escaping poverty. Something millions of previously-poor Chinese are currently doing, causing major global impact without even getting close to the individual carbon footprints of Europe or North America.

WWF [1] shows humankind in ‘overshoot’ mode already and estimates that “by midcentury humanity’s demand on nature will be twice the biosphere’s productive capacity”. In simple terms, this means that by 2050 - with a world population of more than 9 billion - we shall be trying to utilise two planet’s worth of bio-capacity (fresh water, cropland and fisheries etc). In this demonstrably unsustainable predicament, with no second planet available, humanity faces a stark choice: EITHER a gigantic cull by Nature of the excess humans, meaning the death of millions through violence, starvation and disease, or climate change, in the second half of this century; OR, achieving the necessary balance humanely by fewer births. We argue that a good start on this can be made through meeting much unmet need for voluntary, accessible family planning, properly resourced and accessible to all, plus the removal of

many barriers to women [2,3] (which do indeed include lack of education and much misinformation).

Finally, we state robustly: it is ludicrous as well as false to allege that it is because of any financial backers that we make these evidence-based recommendations.

1 Gland: Worldwide Fund for Nature with Global Footprint Network and Zoological Society of London. Living planet report. 2006.  
[www.panda.org/news\\_facts/publications/living\\_planet\\_report/index.cfm](http://www.panda.org/news_facts/publications/living_planet_report/index.cfm).

2 Guillebaud J. Youthquake: population, fertility and environment in the 21st century. Optimum Population Trust, 2007.  
[www.optimumpopulation.org/Youthquake.pdf](http://www.optimumpopulation.org/Youthquake.pdf).

3 Campbell M, Sahin-Hodoglugil N, Potts M. Barriers to fertility regulation: a review of the literature. *Stud Fam Plann* 2006;37:87-98.

Competing interests: JG has received fees and expenses from manufacturers of contraceptives for educational presentations, research projects, and short term consultancies, and is a patron of the Optimum Population Trust. PH is a Trustee of the Optimum Population Trust.