

Analysis Summary of How Organizations Discuss Population

Background

Between July and September of 2020, the Center for Biological Diversity conducted an online evaluation of 228 organizations that work on climate change, conservation, population, health and/or family planning to analyze if and how population pressure is discussed in these fields. The analysis looked at the organizations' websites to determine how they discuss population, the terms they use when discussing it and their specific areas of focus. All organizations were sorted by their main area of focus to identify general observable trends within each field.

Summary

This research shows that many climate change organizations' websites discuss the population pressure solutions noted by [Project Drawdown](#) (namely, advancement in agricultural, carbon capture and transportation technologies) but often leave out the health and education solutions that affect population growth rates.

Similarly, many conservation organizations' websites give a nod to population growth as a driver in the extinction crisis but do not discuss solutions-oriented, people-centered approaches to reducing the impacts of human-caused environmental pressure, possibly because they see population growth as inevitable.

Health organization websites adopt human-centric approaches to reproductive health, highlighting the social, economic and health benefits of improved access to voluntary family planning services but do not talk about population pressure.

Population-focused organizations do address the issue head-on because it is core to their mission, but their efforts to educate the public about the effects of population growth often fail to mention the importance of consumption behaviors and systemic inequalities.

The table below summarizes how the various categories of organizations discuss population and associated solutions on their websites, along with some observed trends.

Type and Number of Groups	How Population is Discussed	What Solutions Are Presented	Summary
Climate change organizations (28)	Some recognized population growth and consumption as drivers of climate change, but population growth was considered inevitable	Creating technologies that adapt to the impact of growing populations. Sexual reproductive health and rights and reproductive justice were not components of the solution	Sometimes mentioned population and sometimes mentioned solutions
Conservation organizations (60)	Recognized population growth as an inevitable problem and tended to be more problem-oriented in their discussion	Rarely discussed solutions, but discussed sustainable utilization of natural resources	Often mentioned population, but rarely mentioned solutions
Health (69) and family-planning organizations (38)	Rarely mentioned population growth, but considered issues that are aggravated by rampant population growth. Focused on	Support of family planning from a human-centric perspective (e.g., improving the lives of young people)	Rarely mentioned population but always mentioned solutions

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	environmental health (i.e., chronic diseases) or supporting family planning	internationally), comprehensive sex education and gender empowerment	
Population organizations (24)	Recognized population growth as an issue in terms of resource constraints, lack of reproductive rights and the extinction crisis	Voluntary family planning and education	Always mentioned population and always mentioned some solutions

Population growth was by far the most used term but others were commonly employed, including: population pressure, population dynamics, demographic trends, overpopulation and demographic momentum.

The most commonly proposed solutions to rapid population growth were advocating for voluntary family planning, gender equity and empowerment (usually explicitly for women), youth empowerment, and advocating for and improving access to comprehensive sex education.

Population pressure is not excluded from present discourse about environmental changes and human-nature interactions, but it is rarely addressed in a direct or comprehensive way. While many organizations may support adaptation policies and technologies and/or recognize population growth as an inevitable burden, they fail to acknowledge the structural barriers and inequalities that create unmet needs for family planning and suppress women’s voices and autonomy.

Proposed Recommendations for Talking About Population Growth

The impacts of population growth are widely recognized across different sectors, but simply mentioning population growth as a threat to the environment is a potentially reductionist argument. Environmental groups that ignore population pressure because the topic is potentially polarizing miss an opportunity to discuss upstream mitigation solutions to climate change and highlight the intersections of health, justice, equity and choice.

The following recommendations focused on rights-based solutions can help organizations overcome these challenges and connect with different fields:

- Conservation organizations should incorporate solutions-oriented, people-centered approaches to reducing the impacts of human-caused environmental pressure. Such approaches focus on reproductive health, rights and justice and gender empowerment.
- Building cross-sectorial collaborations would support the work of all groups involved and could enhance environmental, social, economic and health benefits.
- All organizations should acknowledge how both patriarchy and capitalism affect people and the planet. These larger systems are impacting the work of all organizations reviewed.
- Given the appeal to many organizations of technological adaptation as a solution, environmental groups could apply the term “technology” to contraception (i.e., modern contraception is a climate change mitigation technology), ensuring that the most vulnerable populations are included and empowered in climate action.
- Recognizing the relationship of universal access to family planning and comprehensive sex education to climate change resiliency may resonate well with other groups across different disciplines.
- All organizations should regularly evaluate the language they use and integrate sensitivity readers into all campaigns to prevent harm to others.