

# Friends of the Earth Scotland policy on population

Friends of the Earth Scotland believes the causes of environmental problems lie within our societies and how our economies drive unsustainable, short-term plunder of natural resources as well as inequality and injustice. In common with Friends of the Earth International, we believe that *“the dominant economic and political system is creating unsustainable development, destroying peoples and their environments”*. We recognise that within this current dominant system population growth can be one of the drivers of environmental degradation, however this is a complex issue with multiple components.

Rich developed nations continue to have far higher ecological footprints and per-capita emissions compared with other developing nations. We recognise that this can be expected to change with growing consumption patterns amongst middle classes in some developing countries, which also adds a strong class element, but it is the developed world that is historically responsible for most of the environmental damage. We recognise this historic responsibility in Scotland as an ecological debt built up over decades of over-exploitation of other nations and the global ecosystem which we share with other species.

The latest IPCC figures demonstrate that, in a narrow sense, consumption-based economic growth has contributed more to global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the previous decade compared with population growth.<sup>1</sup> In a wider sense, it is impossible to separate out the environmental impact of economic growth and population growth. Under the dominant economic and political system, people are locked into consuming an ever greater amount of the world's resources such as food, fuels, and minerals and have restricted scope to limit their individual consumption levels. Clearly a different model of development is needed to deliver prosperity and more equality within sustainable levels of consumption.

We recognise gender as a key component of this equality. We believe delivering gender equality is vital on its own terms but academic research has also repeatedly shown that the most effective drivers of reduced birth rates are greater gender equality, women's emancipation, improving access to education for girls and women, providing sexual and reproductive health services and rights, and creating sustainable development to move people out of poverty. However, such activities may be distorted and mistrusted by those who would benefit if they are perceived as having an ulterior motive to curb birth rates. We are supportive of work by other organisations on these issues because these changes are necessary for a fair and just society.

Friends of the Earth Scotland will continue to focus its work on the social and economic causes of inequitable access to, and unsustainable consumption of, the earth's resources, as the major driver of environmental degradation. These campaigns are likely to focus on Scotland and Europe where we have most influence and where per capita consumption is high. As part of Friends of the Earth International and in collaboration with others in the global movement for social justice, we will continue to support campaigns for gender equality and the eradication of poverty because these changes are necessary for a fair and just society regardless of their impact on population.

7<sup>th</sup> May 2014

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1 Working Group III contribution to the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report, Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change. <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/index.shtml>