

An aerial photograph of a forest landscape. A large, irregularly shaped area in the center of the image has been cleared, revealing a mix of brown soil, some green grass, and scattered trees. This cleared area is surrounded by dense, dark green forest. The text is overlaid on this image.

Nature versus Person:

can the 'rights' framework
really constrain human impact?

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What are Rights?

- ▶ Rights are not fundamental laws of nature.
- ▶ Rights are social norms or contracts, agreed as fair minimum standards *within a context*.
- ▶ Different rights can conflict.
- ▶ Conflicts are resolved by limiting rights contextually.
- ▶ When context changes, rights may need to yield.

Are ‘rights of nature’ ecocentric or anthropocentric?

- ▶ Humans can’t survive without consuming other organisms, and competing with them for resources.
 - ▶ Humans transform ecosystems to serve their own needs - a few species are winners, many are losers.
- ▶ ‘Rights of nature’ discourse comes from a realization that the extent of displacement of nature is having many negative impacts both for the ecosystems and for humans.
 - ▶ They could be framed as a means of reasserting ‘commons’ and advancing communally agreed goals over personal interests.
- ▶ How much preservation of each ecosystem or geosystem is enough?
 - ▶ For nature’s sake, or for humanity’s?
 - ▶ “Planetary Boundaries” vs “Half Earth” proposal

Nature's rights conflict directly with human rights.

Nathan Keyfitz 1991:

- ▶ “Every couple has a right to as few or as many children as it wishes. That sounds fair enough, until one meets up with the parallel assertion that every child has the right to adequate nutrition. Suppose the world is made in such a way that these two rights cannot both exist once density goes above a certain point?”

Where is “a certain point”?

- ▶ the point beyond which nature can no longer deliver humanity's needs?
- ▶ The point beyond which “nature's rights” are impinged by humanity's increasing needs? By whose judgement?

In the face of human needs, nature's rights are forfeited

“The bitter truth is that it is neither politically feasible nor ethically justifiable to exclude squatters from parks. This is particularly true given that they have limited livelihood options. Solutions should anticipate the arrival of more squatters, and focus on their integration into other economic sectors.”

- Grace Muriuki, “Chyulu Hills burning reveals Kenya's squatter dilemma” *The Conversation*, 10/10/2016

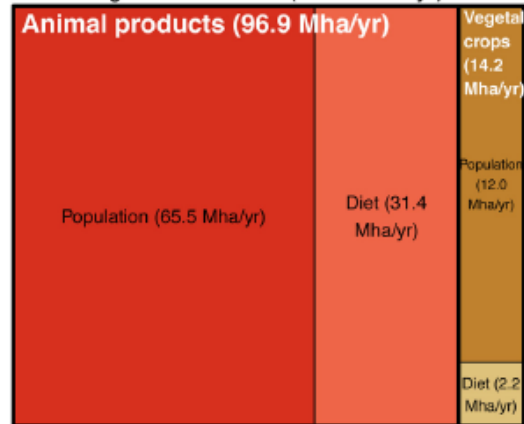
Is there a “solution” for nature in this proposal?



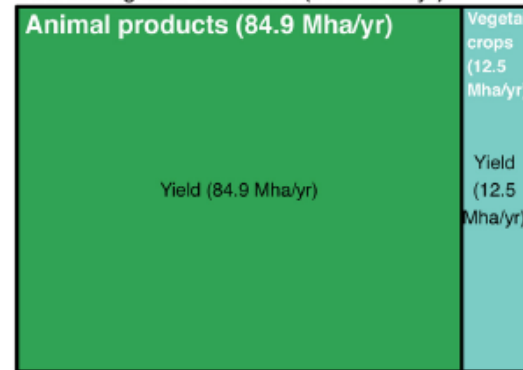
Drivers of change in land use: change in population, diet and yield

a) 1961–1994 (Net 13.7 Mha/yr)

Increasing land allocation (111.1 Mha/yr)

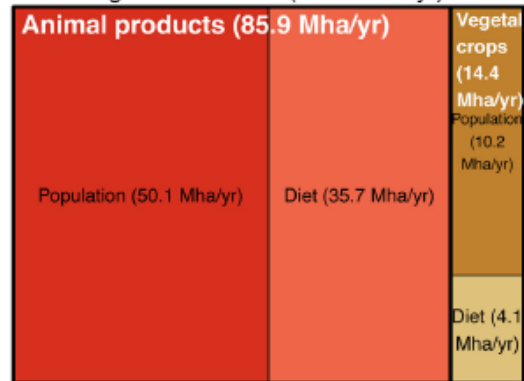


Decreasing land allocation (97.4 Mha/yr)



b) 1994–2011 (Net 4.6 Mha/yr)

Increasing land allocation (100.2 Mha/yr)



Reducing land allocation (95.6 Mha/yr)

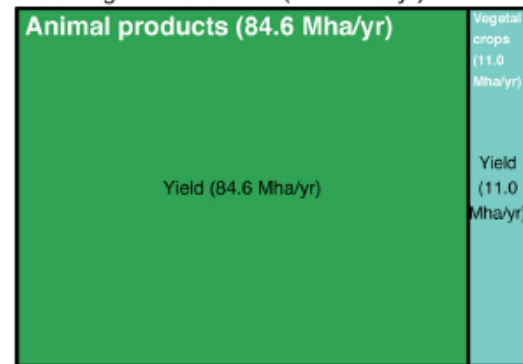


Fig 13. Land allocation change to produce food for human consumption decomposed into net diet, yield and population drivers, (a) 1961–1994 and (b) 1994–2011.

Alexander et al. 2015. Drivers for global agricultural land use change: The nexus of diet, population, yield and bioenergy. Global Environmental Change 35 (2015) 138–147.



Rights and Responsibilities

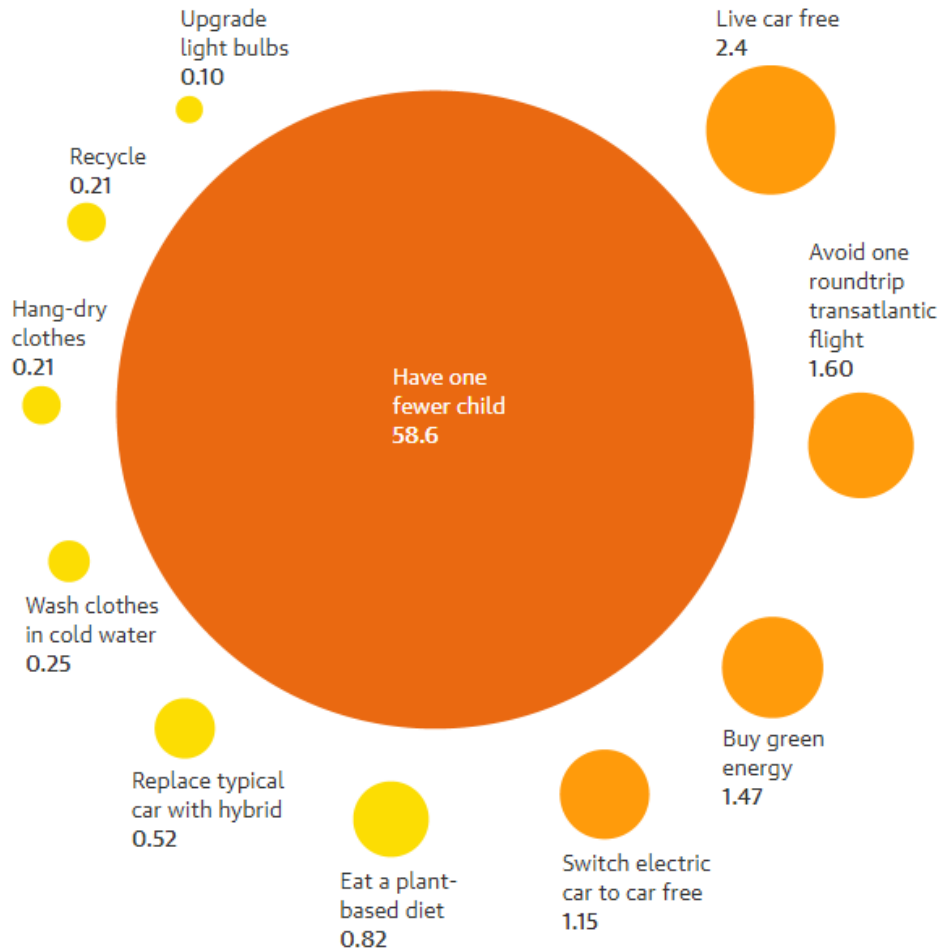
- ▶ “Parents have a basic human right to determine freely and responsibly the number and the spacing of their children.”
- *Tehran International Conference on Human Rights, 1968.*
- ▶ What are parents’ responsibilities?
 - ▶ The interests of their children
 - ▶ The interests of other people
 - ▶ The interests of future generations
 - ▶ The interests of other species
- ▶ What are society’s responsibilities?
 - ▶ to imbue understanding of personal responsibilities, and
 - ▶ to coerce responsible behaviour?
- ▶ Cultural norms and expectations are explicitly taught.
 - ▶ as with littering, bullying, queuing, polite manners

Rights of Nature imply limited rights of procreation

- ▶ The need for Rights of Nature implies (is definitive of) overpopulation.
 - ▶ Social responsibility should require that the link is made explicit.
- ▶ Small families should be acknowledged as an environmental virtue (not mandated)
 - ▶ like recycling, low emissions transport options, using water frugally, not wasting food or energy etc.
 - ▶ People advocating small families should not be howled down as apologists for overconsumption, nor misrepresented as advocating forced measures.

Want to fight climate change? Have fewer children

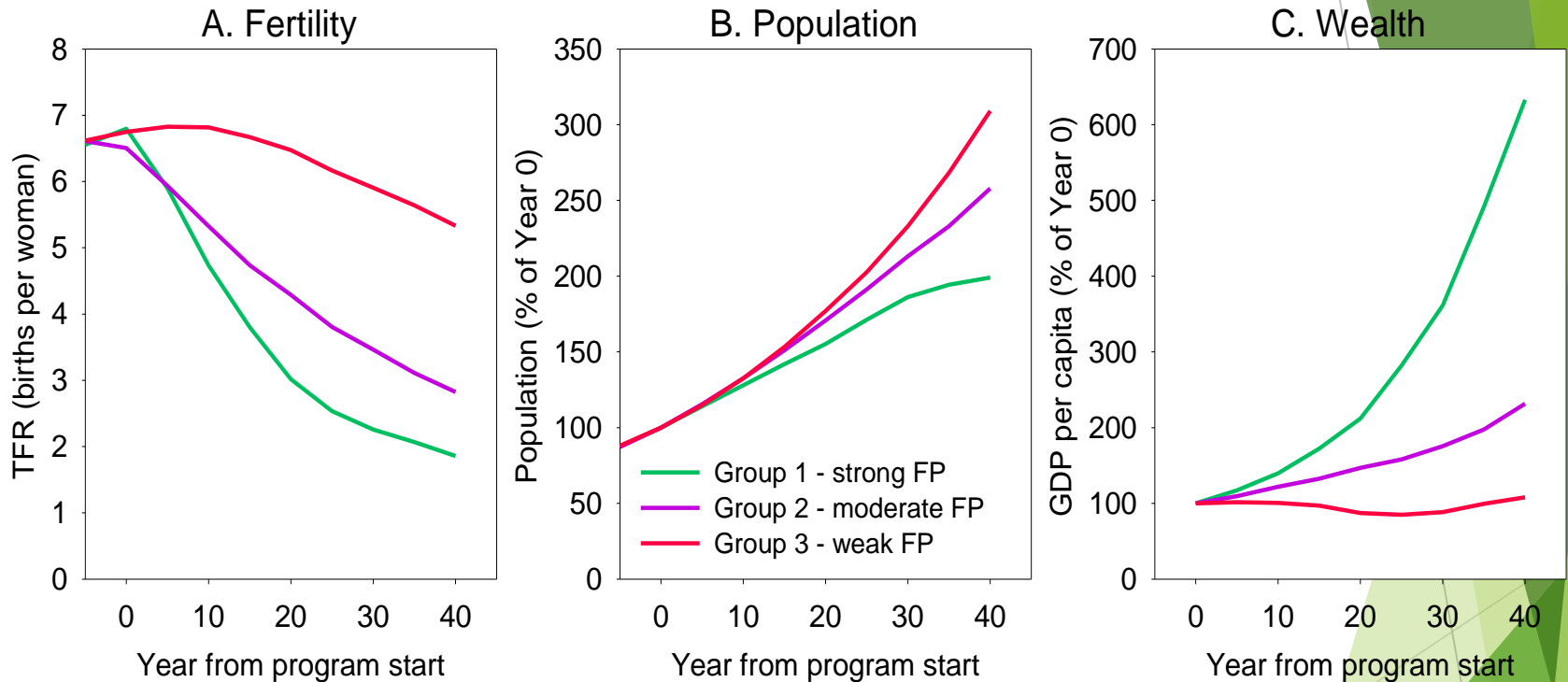
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jul/12/want-to-fight-climate-change-have-fewer-children>



“The climate mitigation gap: education and government recommendations miss the most effective individual actions.”

Wynes and Nicholas (2017)
[Environmental Research Letters 12\(7\): 704024](#)

Choosing rapid fertility decline reduces poverty and empowers women.



The time course of fertility, population and per capita wealth for three groups of developing countries: Group 1 - strong, government-driven non-coercive family planning, Group 2 - moderate or not sustained family planning, Group 3 - weak family planning implementation. Year 0 is the approximate year of program adoption, or 1970 for weak adopters. High migration countries excluded.

The "Itnein Kifaya" (Two is Enough) program seeks to educate women in #Egypt on #populationgrowth and its challenges



Two is enough: A fix for Egypt's overpopulation

Egypt's Ministry of Social Solidarity, in coordination with the Ministry of Health, announced the launch of a population control program targeting 1.3 million Egypti...

al-monitor.com

Recap

- ▶ Rights of Nature require constraining human resource use.
- ▶ Rights of Nature imply limited rights of procreation.
- ▶ Unlimited (irresponsible) procreation was never a right.
- ▶ Societies have a duty to educate people about responsible and irresponsible behaviour.
- ▶ Given the dire state of degradation of biodiversity and earth systems globally, it is irresponsible to cause or abet population growth.
- ▶ People resist discussing population growth ostensibly in defence of the world's poor. This is misguided, as there is nothing more important for improving their prospects than ending population growth, and this is most effectively done through voluntary uptake when problems of population growth are explicitly acknowledged.

Some people are choosing to not have kids, as they think that we don't have a plan for the future, but we do. Here is a graph of human population growth. As you can see, there is no problem.



As our population skyrockets, we simply destroy natural habitat to make more farms and homes to feed and house our beautiful children.



And we just keep breeding more and more, using up more space and resources, destroying the environment and causing more pollution, for our beautiful children.



Until the whole world is crammed full of humans, and we have killed all other species and we are unable to farm enough food to feed ourselves and have no more room for houses. That's the end goal of our plan. I don't know why people are worried. So breed, and be a part of it.



A Taste of the Awful

Thank you for listening!