

The Worst Addiction: Population Growth

Opinion

Volume 4 Issue 2- 2023

Author Details

*Joseph Chamie

Center for Migration Studies, consulting demographer, a former director of the United Nations Population Division, United States

*Corresponding author

Joseph Chamie, Center for Migration Studies, consulting demographer, a former director of the United Nations Population Division, United States

Article History

Received: October 19, 2023 Accepted: October 27, 2023 Published: October 27, 2023

Opinion

Among the various troubling **addictions**, the one having the most worrisome consequences for humanity and planet Earth is population growth. Some addictions, such as illicit drug use, gun violence, alcohol abuse and junk food consumption, are contributing to chronic diseases, injuries and the premature deaths of millions of people. The sustained growth of populations, however, is far more troubling as it is undermining the current and future wellbeing of humanity.

As it contributes to the climate crisis, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, natural resource depletion and pollution, population growth poses a **serious threat** to future **sustainability**. Concerned with its serious and far reaching consequences, climatologists, **environmentalists**, **scientists**, **celebrities** and **others** have repeatedly called for human population stabilization, with some urging ultimately reducing its size. Despite those calls, the proponents of demographic growth, including many elected government officials, business leaders, investors and economic advisors, have by and large disregarded the widely available **evidence** on the consequences of population growth published in documents, reports and articles. In both their policies and actions, they have dismissed recommendations for population stabilization.

The pro-growth proponents erroneously claim that the numerous cited consequences of population growth on the world's climate, environment, biodiversity, natural resources and human wellbeing are greatly exaggerated. They repeatedly argue that those consequences, including higher average temperatures, severe droughts and **hurricanes**, excessive heat waves, **floods**, rising sea levels and **high tides**, degraded environments, endangered wildlife, exploited natural resources and increased pollution, should be calmly and resolutely brushed aside. Less than one hundred years ago, i.e., in 1927, world population reached 2,000,000,000. Less than fifty years later, i.e., in 1974, the planet's human population had doubled to 4,000,000,000.

And nearly fifty years later in 2023, world population has doubled again to 8,000,000,000 Figure [1].

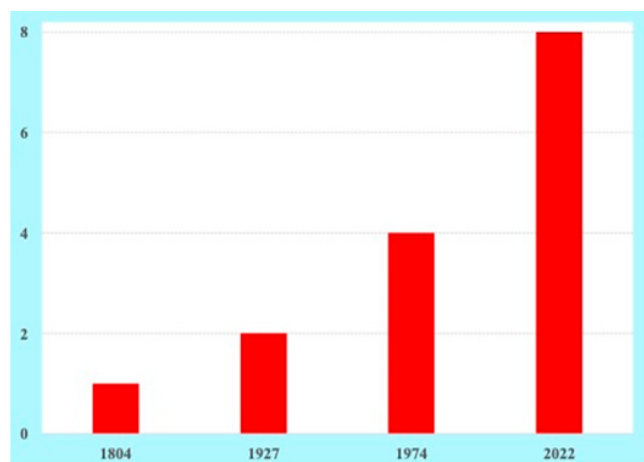


Figure 1: World Population Doubling: 1804, 1927, 1974 and 2022 (billions).

Source: United Nations.

Despite the calls for population stabilization, any slowdown or stagnation in the growth of populations is typically viewed with **panic** and **fear**. Economic growth, advocates claim, **requires** sustained population growth. In brief, they see a growing population producing **more goods** and services leading to higher economic growth. Besides being viewed as fundamental for **economic growth**, pro-growth advocates consider population growth essential for profits, taxes, labor force, politics, cultural leadership and power. Any slowdown in a country's demographic growth, such as is being experienced by many countries during the

past decade, is met by political, business and economic leaders ringing **alarm bells** and warning of **economic calamities**. Calls for **limited immigration** in order to achieve population stabilization are also strongly resisted, especially by businesses and special interest groups. Reducing immigration levels, they often claim, is incompatible with the needs for labor and sustained economic growth.

Some have even claimed that population decline due to low birth rates is a far bigger risk to civilization than global warming. In addition, as **others** have stressed, worker shortages coupled with population ageing are having serious social, economic and political repercussions, especially with regard to the solvency of national retirement programs. The pro-growth **advocates** warn of a pending population crisis due to low fertility rates, many of which are well below the replacement level. Their **solution** to the low fertility induced population crisis is to encourage the public to have more babies. However, the advocates of raising fertility rates are typically not in favor of providing resources for childcare and family assistance.

Many of those calling for increased rates of population growth through higher fertility rates are simply promoting **Ponzi demography**. The underlying strategy of Ponzi demography is to privatize the profits and socialize the economic, social and environmental costs incurred from increased population growth. Many provinces, cities and local communities also seek to have growing populations and lament slow-

downs and declines in demographic growth. By and large, population stabilization is viewed as "**population stagnation**", which not only suppresses economic growth for businesses but also reduces job opportunities for workers. At the same, however, they claim population slowdowns are contributing to **worker shortages**.

In response to dire warnings of population stagnation or collapse, **others** believe that lower fertility and smaller populations should be celebrated rather than feared. In addition to positive consequences for the environment and climate change, lower birth rates are frequently **linked** to increased education of women, greater gender equality, and higher living standards. Despite the calls for population stabilization, the world's addiction to population growth is likely to persist for some time. World population is expected to continue growing throughout the 21st century, likely reaching 10,000,000,000 by 2058.

In sum, the repeated warnings by scientists, commissions and concerned others about the serious consequences of demographic increase for climate change, the environment, pollution, etc. appear insufficient to modify the addiction to population growth any time soon. As a result of delays in stabilizing world population, future policies and programs aimed at addressing those consequences are likely to be not only exceedingly **costly** but also too little and too late to mitigate the profound effects of population growth on humanity and the planet.

