

WHAT GIVES OVERPOPULATION ITS LEGS?

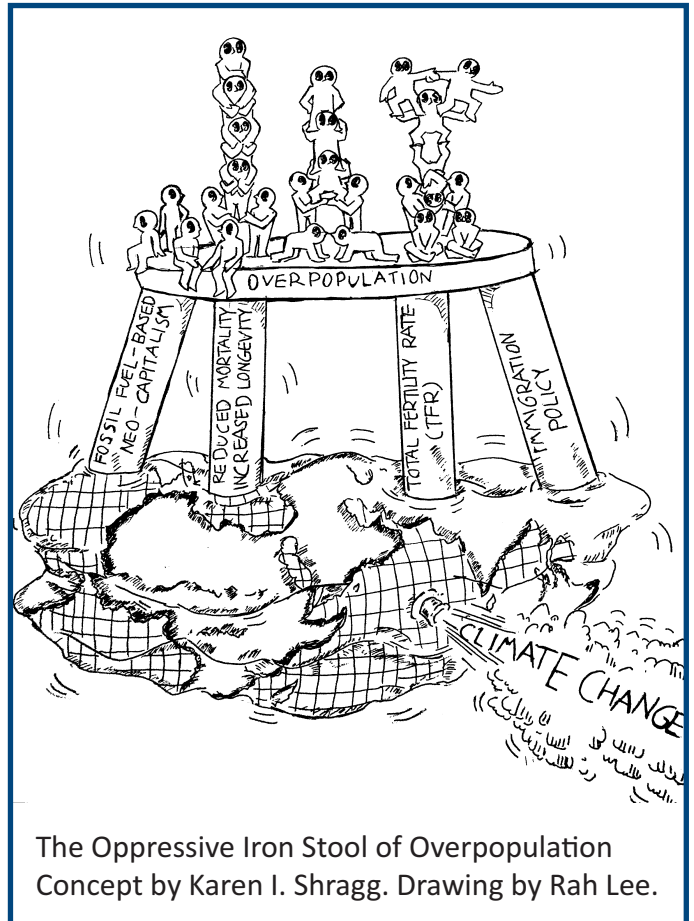
An NPG Forum Paper
by Dr. Karen I. Shragg

“We need to name the main reasons why overpopulation is here and knocking at our door so loudly. If we can come to terms with how we got here, only then can we begin to untangle ourselves from its deadly grip. To keep it simplified while remaining truthful, think of the overpopulation issue like a four-legged iron stool squishing the Earth and its potential for supporting all life forms, not just us. All of the legs of the oppressive stool of overpopulation work together to create the mess, yet they do not all get the attention they need.”

Excerpt from my book,
Change Our Stories, Change our World
(Freethought House Press: November 2020)

What more can be said about the oppression of overpopulation that I and my colleagues have not pontificated on for decades? Hopefully this cartoon I commissioned from artist Rah Lee of Singapore can help us to understand what forces have allowed us to become overpopulated in the first place. What is so significant about this illustration is that it dares to point fingers at the four main reasons we came to gain so many humans so rapidly on our planet. We must acknowledge all of the reasons behind adding 5.5 billion people in the most recent 100 years and why we continue to grow by over 80 million per year. If we do not take a deep look into this mirror, we will be unable to untangle ourselves from this unsustainable mess.

Diverted conversations about developed world consumption verses consumption in the developing world doesn't help us address the deep entanglement of adding over 200,000 people per day to an already bloated planet. Without a doubt, human numbers are



anchored to consumption, this is clear. It is even clearer how richer countries consume more resources per capita while stealing resources and opportunities from poorer ones. But sheer numbers also matter, because no matter how low we go on the energy/food chain we cannot go low enough when billions share our niche as apex predators. Many discussions and “aha!” moments need to be had, because virtually all global discussions leave out the multiplying factor: the menace of overpopulation.

To explore the four legs of what I like to call *The Oppressive Iron Stool of Overpopulation*, one needs to realize that they all work together to create our unsustainable numbers. Overpopulation exists because there are more successful births than deaths in the context of a landscape of limited resources. We

continue to suffer the results of our success. We are witnessing the systemic failures of the pressure that is put on our biosphere by the demand of billions of us, but most of us don't view those failures as connected to each other or to us. We are experiencing simultaneous urgent problems which can all be traced back to overpopulation and all of the reasons that cause it. From the sixth mass extinction of species around the world, to our plastic-filled oceans and resource scarcity to grinding poverty, overpopulation is rarely tagged for the guilty party it is. Media tells us separate stories: it is we who must connect the dots so that we can stop spinning our wheels and start coming up with real solutions which embrace rather than deny our biosphere's limits.

The easiest leg to describe is TFR, or total fertility rate. The average number of children per woman is a focus of much attention by population groups such as World Population Balance (www.worldpopulationbalance.org). If a couple has two children, and they in turn each have two children, then given good health and no catastrophes, by the third generation, there will be eight progeny. In the same scenario, with one extra child, the third generation would have 27 grandchildren and so on. TFR is affected in various ways by economic opportunity, culture, infant mortality, access to birth control and cultural expectation of desired family size. To coach people to have small families is a great way out of overpopulation's oppressive effects on nature and natural resources. Unfortunately, these efforts are often resisted due to an overall myopic view that somehow this is a sacred choice and human numbers can be increased without serious consequences.

Total fertility rate becomes tricky in a world pushing 8 billion. ZPG (Zero Population Growth), now called The Population Connection, encouraged people back in the 1960s to stop at two children back when the world population was much less, approximately 3 billion. Now something called population momentum needs to be considered, for the larger the population, the less effective stopping at two children will be. Growth will continue especially in countries where their median age is now fairly young and will soon enter the age of reproduction. Niger, a land-locked country north of Nigeria in Africa, for instance, has a median age of 14 whereas the US median age is 33. That makes a big difference when setting the TFR with the goal of stabilizing and reducing human numbers. Stopping at two children per family globally will now keep us growing to 9 billion and beyond. This is the reasoning behind

World Population Balance's *One Planet One Child* campaign. We are beyond using two as a TFR goal. It is meeting with great resistance because few realize that the ecological peril our high numbers are delivering to our doorstep with increasing horror each day should be our number one concern.

The second leg of the stool refers to how the modern world has been successful in curing diseases, decreasing infant mortality and increasing crop yields. As harsh as it seems, we are disturbing nature's way of keeping all of its species from being too successful. What would happen if there were an explosion of great horned owls in our forests? They would run out of mice and experience a die-off. As apex predators, owls are supposed to be the fewest, so that the food chain of plants, grasshoppers, and skunks can support them.

Imagine a village living sustainably for a thousand years using four wells to fulfill the needs of their 1,000 villagers. When their population grows because of interventions on their behalf to cure diseases and allow them to double to 2,000, the water in those wells will eventually dry up forcing them to dig deeper wells and walk further to get water. Success in increasing populations at some point challenges the ability of the environment to adequately support those increases.

Resource scarcity and harsh weather events have always been nature's way of keeping her animals in balance. Humans have added perpetual war, homicide, cancer causing chemicals, air pollution, water pollution and suicide to the list. But improved medical procedures, medicines, nutrition, vaccines, diagnostic procedures, efficient means of irrigation and fertilization of crops have all made inroads into increasing our ability to double our longevity from an average of 40 to 72 years in the last century. All it takes is for the birth rate to exceed the death rate and populations grow. In 2020, births exceed deaths by over 2 to 1 or by approximately 9,500 per hour across the globe. This has been going on for years and has greatly contributed to our overpopulation problem. In spite of the work done by groups like UNFPA (The United Nations Family Planning Association) to reduce births, our success at reducing deaths while underfunding their efforts in the arena of family planning is a perfect storm of population growth creation. According to their website "UNFPA works to support family planning by ensuring a steady, reliable supply of quality contraceptives; strengthening national health systems; advocating for

policies supportive of family planning; and gathering data to support this work. UNFPA also provides global leadership in increasing access to family planning, by convening partners – including governments – to develop evidence and policies, and by offering programmatic, technical and financial assistance to developing countries.” It is ludicrous that as our numbers continue to grow, the funding for UNFPA is decreasing. Again, according to their website, their funds have decreased by 11%. This leg of the iron stool of overpopulation comes from the combination of diminished efforts to effectively stabilize and decrease births combined with our success in the area of reducing deaths and prolonging life.

The third leg, fossil fueled based neo-capitalism, plays a deeply embedded role in keeping our numbers high. We can’t brush our teeth without using fossil fuel. We can’t heat or cool our homes, eat a meal or turn on a computer without using fossil fuel. Even so-called green energy sources use up limited resources in their production and end up in our landfills when their life span is over. The fallacies of solar panels and wind turbines as the alternative to our destruction of the planet is well described in Ozzie Zehner’s book, *Green Illusions: The Dirty Secrets of Clean Energy and the Future of Environmentalism*, (2013). Zehner states: “Environmentalists generally object to battery-powered devices and for good reason: batteries require mined minerals, employ manufacturing processes that leak toxins into local ecosystems and leave behind an even-worse trail of side effects upon disposal. Though when it comes to the largest mass-produced battery-powered gadget ever created – the electric car – environmentalists cannot jump from their seats fast enough to applaud it.” His research was also covered extensively in the film he co-produced: the 2019 environmental documentary *Planet of the Humans*.

Fossil fuel is the engine that drives our growth-based economy and our daily lives. It’s not just in our own transportation, but in the way our food is grown and shipped to us. It is the way our homes and businesses are heated and cooled. Its production is causing our planet to warm and has put us in the precarious position of reaching no-return numbers in parts per million of carbon that are frightening to even write about. According to the scientists at Climate.gov we have warmed to a point of over 409 parts per million which is more than it has been in the last 800,000 years. It is impossible to decouple fossil fuel use with our globalized neo-classical economic system.

Gross National Product (GNP) is the yardstick by which a country’s success is measured. Each year it must grow to be successful and more consumers, buying more products, stocks, and bonds and demanding more development helps GNP to grow. The crony capitalists and developers (temporarily) benefit, while the people suffer, for the rise in demand decreases supply and prices rise for the average consumer of everything from housing to food and commercial goods. Our growth-based economic system essentially consumes limited natural capital of fuels and minerals, creating pollution in its wake, as it burns up limited fossil fuels and converts them into market-based products. These products are then sold with billions of dollars of advertising. The production and disposal of these products creates both waste and biosphere-killing climate change gases. This system is based on perpetual growth which means that there is a constant requirement to getting bigger and bigger with no end in sight. Overpopulation comes in because growth-based economics requires more and more consumers for more and more unnecessary products which come in a plethora of flavors, styles and aromas. Their purchase creates wealth for the sellers, buyers be damned, for those products are not only unnecessary they are often unhealthy. Those married to growth with hedge funds for bridesmaids to leverage their profits, love it when the population grows because it means more consumers and the potential for them to grow their portfolios.

We keep looking for more energy resources to power the beast of growth and this just keeps the great gobbling of the planet’s limited and fragile resources keeping us heading off the cliff of disaster. When we put what can only be described as moral limits on our population and dispel the notion that economic growth is desirable, we will be headed in a much better direction. As Herman Daly, founder of Steady State Economics so rightly stated in 1977: “With limits on population and economic growth (i.e. within a steady-state economy), free food, and free energy as well, would be a blessing. But in the current growth context they would be a curse; free energy would simply make it easier for a growth society to destroy the ecosystem.” Efforts to create a more sustainable world with a stable and decreasing population threatens the success of this deeply ingrained system which must be tackled. Fortunately, CASSE (Center for the Advancement of Steady State Economies) has taken on this enormous task with its efforts to cut our emotional, political and cultural ties to growth with their efforts to offer an alternative. See their work at steadystate.org.

The fourth leg of growth is the leg referencing a given country's immigration policy. It is easy to understand why it is such a touchy topic. We all know, love and come from immigrants, unless we have indigenous ancestry. It is the most avoided topic since abortion became entangled in the overpopulation issue but deal with it, we must. Immigration happens for many reasons. It would be amazing to see a map of the world, if we could somehow magically erase the hatred and bigotry that has plagued us for centuries. Without it many people would have stayed in their country of origin instead of fleeing for their lives, lucky to make it to any safer destination.

As far back as 1492, during the Spanish Inquisition, Spain's king Ferdinand and queen Isabella issued a decree that all Jews had to convert or die. Many decided on option three and volunteered to risk their lives by joining the crews of the Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria, the ships of the Italian explorer Columbus. This inspired the title of the book, "Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean" (Kritzler 2008). Kritzler's subtitle reveals their inspiration to leave Spain and explore the "New" world, "How a generation of swashbuckling Jews carved out an empire in the New World in their quest for treasure, religious freedom and revenge." Those three reasons have been expanded upon since the 1400s. The Spanish influence on the so-called new world continues to this day in terms of the language spoken and the destabilizing influence of centuries of Spanish rule over the remaining indigenous people.

Fast forward to my ancestors who had to flee Russia in the 1920s because of never ending anti-Semitism and the poverty of ghetto life. The Bolshevik revolution led to a persecution of all religions. Jewish properties were seized, and synagogues destroyed. Jews were also disproportionately conscripted into service in the Russian army, as my grandparents were. It was under these circumstances that my paternal and maternal grandparents fled, most to America; my great uncle could only get into Argentina. Today people seek career opportunities, still others are looking for more lenient lifestyle laws. Many want to go where they believe they can make a more economically secure life for themselves and their families and then the rest of their relatives often wish to follow.

Ironically the US has a miserable track record of creating the unstable conditions underlying much of our modern-day immigration crisis. US Policies have

long acted on behalf of corporate interests and hurt the local people especially indigenous populations. Historically the US has supported rival political parties often in the name of stopping communism. This caused havoc notably in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras from which the local people have never recovered. Corruption fills in the gaps when governments are destabilized, and gangs now rule the landscape, keeping citizens living in fear of their lawless pursuits of territory and power. Brave journalists have consistently and at great risk to their own safety, tried to expose the way the US and its corporate backers have used their power to bully poorer countries for their own benefit. Entire books and journals are filled with documentation of the hijacking of the natural resources of poor countries with promises of future riches while robbing them blind.

All of these unpoliced actions in turn spark the desire for the desperate and newly impoverished to leave what is familiar in order to risk the danger and unknown world of becoming an immigrant in a country which will take generations to feel like their own. The problem is that now that our world has ballooned up to just shy of 8 billion with shortages increasing, no country can absorb those who seek refuge due to reasons beyond their control. In the last twenty years the population of Central America has increased to 180,225,483, from 135,322,350. 16.4% of them live in extreme poverty. That is approximately 28,000,000 people who would understandably love a chance at a better life by risking it all to move northward to the 'promised' land. No country can absorb 28 million people without extreme risk to the quality of life of those already living there. Resources are not endless, no matter how much we wish they were. According to the Global Footprint Network (www.globalfootprintnetwork.org) the US is double what its sustainable numbers should be, and that is without considering the space needed for wildlife.

The US population has continued to grow to its 2020 numbers of more than 330 million. While numbers grow resources shrink. Open space, fresh water, and energy are all in higher demand and none of them is without an endpoint. What does increase with more people are all the things we dread: traffic, congestion, crime, pollution and loss of wildlife. As environmentalist Gary Wockner states in his article, "It's Time To Talk About Population Growth", (2020) "Human population growth is either the root cause, or a primary cause, of every environmental problem we

face on the planet, as well as every problem I've worked to address in my career. A quick list of the causes I've fought for: protecting wildlife and wildlife habitat, fighting fossil fuel extraction and climate change, and protecting free-flowing rivers and waterways. All are under siege by human population growth as either the root cause or a primary factor." Indeed, the U.S. population continues to grow by 1,700,000 per year or 200 per hour.¹ Much of that growth is now due to immigration. According to the Pew Research Center, "Looking forward, immigrants and their descendants are projected to account for 88% of U.S. population growth through 2065, assuming current immigration trends continue." In addition to new arrivals, U.S. births to immigrant parents will be important to future growth in the country's population. In 2018, the percentage of women giving birth in the past year was higher among immigrants (7.5%) than among the U.S. born (5.7%)."²

The leg of immigration is an important leg of the stool even though it is experienced as a local overpopulation phenomenon, and not connected to increasing the overall global population, as people are moving from one country to another. Parenthetically, immigration usually does add to climate change gases because as people move from the developing world to the developed world there are more opportunities to consume more products and use energy.

The reason it deserves to be one whole leg of the iron stool is that its effect is a powerful one on an individual country experiencing growth. It also needs more attention from an ecological perspective, because the world looks more often through the socio-political lens. The stones, darts and arrows that are thrown at those trying to have a civil discussion, reveal a lack of deep understanding of the forgotten grim reality of overpopulation's negative impact. Growth is a harsh force no matter where it comes from, and it is no reflection on the individual immigrants themselves, merely an ecologically reality that must be addressed logically and humanely because we are at a time in human history where our population is at such a high level that the rules have changed and we must change with them. To be sure, these are painful changes, but not as painful as the ones that nature has in store for us.

Though overpopulation is a global problem, it is experienced locally. As American ecologist Garrett Hardin pointed out so many years ago, growth happens locally and must be addressed where each of

us lives. In his essay, "The Global Pothole Problem",³ he told a story that taught us that potholes happen globally, but we must address them in our own neighborhoods, because that is where the rules are made and enforced. The more a richer country expands its population, the more resources will be consumed, creating both pollution and scarcity. So, a given country's immigration policies will affect its own numbers and result in more consumption. Immigration from poor countries to richer ones, as a trend, also increases the total amount of climate changing pollutants, as new immigrants are likely to increase their global footprint upon adopting a more modern lifestyle.

As indicated in the cartoon, all of these legs contribute to our horrific problems of climate change. Our climate is getting measurably hotter resulting in more wildfires, stronger storms, and sketchy rainfalls effecting crop success. To address the frightening fallout of climate change without addressing overpopulation and the way it increases the production of greenhouse gases is a lot like trying to sweep up leaves from a tree that keeps losing its leaves as you futilely rake underneath its branches. Yet that is where many of our most devoted scientists and activists remain, acting downstream away from the controversy and far away from the solutions that have a chance of working to keep the planet supporting us.

Overpopulation's reach goes far beyond climate change: it drives overdevelopment, air and water pollution, loss of species, traffic, and is the engine behind the density, crime and grime of our cities, and the sprawl of our suburbs. So why do we continue to ignore the oppressive legs of overpopulation in our efforts to better the lot of humanity? There are many reasons, some cultural others emotional and still others biological. The issue mostly lands in the lap of a political atmosphere that has no oxygen left for this silent monster. Indeed, too many are invested in the status quo when a paradigm shift is required. The reason for getting our hands dirty on this issue is because to do nothing is immoral, for suffering and more misery is on its way. A concern about overpopulation drives few of our decisions when it comes to policies surrounding how many people the biosphere, or our individual countries can handle. Economics, religions of all stripes and politicians are all offered a seat at the table and leave the principles of ecological limits without a chair. It is often not even let in the room.

As Sir David Attenborough says in his latest documentary, *A Life on Our Planet*, we not only should appreciate nature, we cannot survive without an intact natural world. On top of our preoccupations with other issues deemed more important, are accusations of racism. This attempt to silence the efforts of overpopulation activists is based on a past which did have a grounding in inexcusable notions of xenophobia and eugenics. But that is a sad and embarrassing history which has been reckoned with and is no longer driving the movement. It is now driven by the deep concern that too many people trying to eke out a living on a limited planet will destroy what remains of the natural world and ultimately render our planet unable to support us.

In Madrid back in December of 2019, I shared the only panel on overpopulation at the two-week long COP25 conference put on by the International Panel of Climate Change with two of my esteemed colleagues, Dr. Alon Tal and *Overpopulation Atlas* author and doctoral student João Abegão. João spoke bravely to the crowd saying, “Our burgeoning human numbers constitute a major ‘elephant in the room’. It is politically incorrect to even discuss the question of population while at the same time how many of us there are is obviously one of the most relevant drivers of climate change and the general ecological breakdown that is being experienced around the world.”

Perhaps a metaphor can better explain what we are up against. Imagine that the whole world was an ocean liner. The top deck is the most spacious with the most windows and the best food and medical care. The rich representatives of dominant culture live here. They sit at the captain’s table ensuring that they continue to benefit from the limited resources of the ship beyond their fair share. The lower levels have progressively less food and less quality of life, they are populated by the less well off, and the servants are paid low wages. They live in the part of the ship without any windows at all. Uprisings frequently occur by the enlightened passengers in an effort to try and bring fairness and equity to all. But there are a few who bypass these demonstrations and efforts to equalize the resources and policies for all on the ship. They are castigated as those without a conscience, but this small group has been busy looking out into the ocean and although they agree that the ship is unfairly organized into the haves and have nots due to racism and classism, they are focused on a much bigger problem. They see huge icebergs ahead and are

desperate to keep the entire ship from sinking. To those who don’t see the icebergs, they seem callous, their messages dismissed. But those who are alarmed must spend all of their energy trying to get to the captain and steer the ship away from the icebergs. They know it won’t matter if there is success on all social justice fronts when the entire ship is resting at the bottom of the ocean.

The passengers who are headed straight for the captain’s cabin, are frequently criticized for being mostly people of privilege. There is reason for this. Those who have to struggle daily to keep their own heads above water do not have time to look out the window, let alone go to the upper decks and see the icebergs ahead. Those who have some level of privilege have the time to ponder the future and make their warnings. The only barrier to having more diversity among overpopulation activists, is the oppression of overpopulation itself which falls disproportionately on the shoulders of those already struggling with poverty, prejudice and the evils of inequality. It is the moral imperative of those with privilege to look out for the rest of the world, and that is just what we are trying to do.

The one thing missing in this metaphor is the wild world. According to the World Wildlife Fund, over 60% of wild animals are now gone and this has been happening in the last 40 years. We have added 4.5 billion people in those four decades and yet in their Living Planet Report of 2018, you will be hard pressed to find a word about overpopulation. Shame on these wildlife advocates for using only euphemisms for human overpopulation with terms like, “human activity” and “excessive overconsumption”. How can we save wildlife when we are dishonest about why they are going extinct under our watch?

In Chapter 3, entitled, “From Limitless to Limited” of my previously mentioned upcoming book, I discuss the terrible turn our political discourse has taken which silences the outspoken without a fair trial. This trend is helping no one, least of all those who are already marginalized because the already rich and powerful will be able to shelter themselves for a while from the worst of the problems instigated by overpopulation.

“We try hard to make policy makers see how our policies of untethered growth hurt everything from our water supplies to wildlife

and our ability to support those within our borders already. To work to dismiss intelligent and out of the box thinkers and advocates for the kind of world we all want and need to live in, does not serve our collective need to eradicate racism. It only serves our dysfunctional need to say we have done something in a world that needs so much fixing. I request that those calling for the canceling of anyone involved in population stabilization actually read their work and become familiar with macro level environmental thinking. To continue to ignore what we are really saying is to harm the already disadvantaged among us. Environmental ills aggravate inequality. Scarcity is felt first by those without enough. Scarcity is not alleviated by having a larger population, it is exacerbated by it. So, to listen to those who have spent their careers studying these issues is to potentially help those we should be caring about the most.

“There is an Emmy award winning short documentary called, Tashi and the Monk from Pilgrim Films, which illustrates the upstream thinking I am talking about here. The Buddhist monk featured in the film, himself an orphan, decides to create a loving community and take in orphans so that they can be nurtured and educated. He wants them to have promising, loving lives. He soon becomes a father figure to ninety children. At one point in the film he turns away an obviously needy boy. At first viewers think he is heartless by turning him away, but it soon becomes clear that the community is full to the brim. There are no more beds and the staff complain about not being able to give each child the food, space and attention they need already. They beg the monk to please not allow anymore children or the children they are trying to help will suffer. The monk is not a harsh child hater, he is a loving man faced with hard decisions. Those who are holding up a mirror and showing the breach of the carrying capacity of the United States and many other countries are not evil either. We must not shoot the messenger; we must give a platform to those trying to make us see what is difficult to grasp given our current narratives.”

A key and most controversial part of the cartoon

is that it shows climate change as a result of the four legs of overpopulation. Just because the indisputable devastation of climate change takes up all of the air in the room, does not mean it is the biggest issue we should worry about. Two hundred people cutting down a forest to raise livestock is vastly different than 20,000 people setting fires to the landscape, no matter how sustainably they farm. At a certain point demand for just basic needs overwhelms the resource. Toothpaste tubes and floss are used by everyone and they seem like an insignificant source of non-biodegradable waste but not when multiplied by 330,000,000 people concerned with their oral hygiene. Climate deniers are in a category all their own, but climate activists are also guilty of not telling the whole truth about everything that contributes to our ever increasing carbon emissions. Back in 1992 the closest the Union of Concerned Scientists could get to saying the word *overpopulation*, was to focus on growth. They warned that “Pressures resulting from unrestrained population growth put demands on the natural world that can overwhelm any efforts to achieve a sustainable future. If we are to halt the destruction of our environment, we must accept limits to that growth.”

More recently, The Association of World Scientists (AWS) has posted a list of those academics who signed on to a paper warning of humanity’s predicament. According to their website 13,653 scientists from 156 countries have signed a letter which begins:

“We scientists have a moral obligation to clearly warn humanity of any catastrophic threat. In this paper, we present a suite of graphical vital signs of climate change over the last 40 years. ...We suggest six critical and interrelated steps that governments and the rest of humanity can take to lessen the worst effects of climate change, covering 1) Energy, 2) Short-lived pollutants, 3) Nature, 4) Food, 5) Economy, and 6) Population....” The focus of AWS is of course mostly on climate change, a more politically palatable narrative, but at least population made it to number 6 on their list, almost an afterthought.⁴

Those of us who can see the whole iceberg have to empower these scientists to speak in even a louder voice about the full truth, climate change is a result of our overpopulation predicament. No ground can be gained when numbers keep growing. The NGO 350.org, Bill McKibben’s climate organization,

focuses their attention on divesting from fossil fuels without ever mentioning overpopulation. Several years back they did a “Do the Math” tour; I got excited for about five minutes. I thought that they were finally going to do the math and realize that each additional passenger on planet earth represents 56 tons of carbon per year, in the developed world. But no, sadly they were talking about parts per million of carbon and the deadly increase in the forecast. I also doubt their donors who contribute to their budget of over 16 million dollars would tolerate such a radical position. McKibben’s organization is far from alone. It would take an entire forum paper to run through all of the climate focused organizations and their leaders who refuse to mention overpopulation’s role in their issue.

Over the years I have worked with many groups who have each been trying to reach the captain of the ship with the message that overpopulation is the iceberg which will sink us. The earth would be cooler, the wildlife less threatened, our survival less on the line if only those of us running for the captain’s door were given a platform.

And yet all of us need to be allowed to speak from a booming microphone that the entire ship can hear. I know that it is extremely challenging to focus even on one leg of this overwhelming stool. Quicksand surrounds each leg of the stool. It is a daunting task to remain focused and create messages that people can

hear, without being offended. But in doing so population groups inadvertently make it seem that theirs is THE solution to the overpopulation predicament. But the truth is that all of these legs form the stool in an interconnected, interwoven way and all are responsible for our ‘success’ as a species. It would be best if all population groups – those who work strictly on immigration, those who work only on economics, those who work on family planning and TFR – joined hands to share their expertise and to strategize on how best to tame this beast together. For if given a multiple-choice quiz about the answers to alleviating the oppression on our planet by the iron stool of overpopulation, the answer is D: all of the above.

NOTES

1. U.S. Census. Accessed January, 2020. [census.gov/popclock/world](https://www.census.gov/popclock/world). Courtesy www.worldpopulationbalance.org
2. Abby Budiman, “Key Findings about U.S. Immigrants” Fact Tank News in the Numbers Aug 20, 2020
3. “Filters Against Folly”, Garrett Hardin 1985
4. <https://scienistswarning.forestry.oregonstate.edu/>



Dr. Karen I. Shragg is the author of the new book *Change Our Stories, Change Our World* (2020) as well as *Move Upstream, A Call to Solve Overpopulation* (2015), both published by Freethought House Press. She is on the advisory board of World Population Balance and speaks on the topic of including overpopulation in our discourse to groups and at conferences in the US and around the world. Her doctorate is from the University of St. Thomas in critical pedagogy and she is a professional naturalist at the Wood Lake Nature Center in Richfield, Minnesota where she has been its director since 1991. Her talks and books can be found at www.movingupstream.com.

NOTE: The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of NPG, Inc.



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