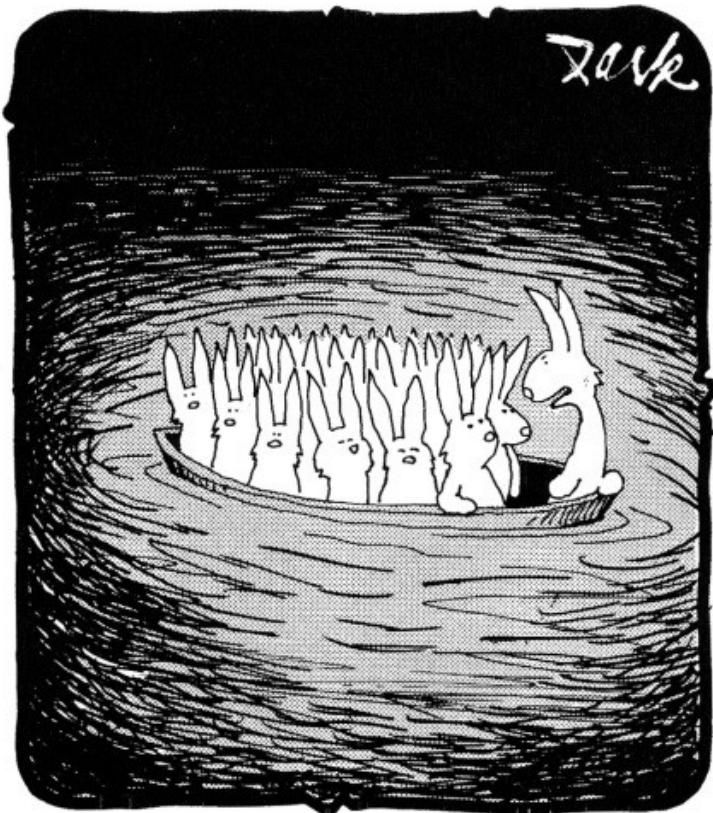


POPULATION MATTERS

Maggie Hall's summary of a talk by Stephen Bown, of [Population Matters](#), in March 2015

As Humanists who believe that there is only one life and one world that we can be sure of inhabiting, it is surely vitally important that we are active in ensuring that world is protected and preserved. It's generally agreed that the biggest threat to the world today is the unsustainable life style of its human population. As a species we have become our own worst enemy, using up the Earth's resources far faster than they can ever be replaced. The main reason for that should be blindingly obvious to anyone – there are just far too many of us! On 4th March 2015 our speaker was Stephen Bown of University College, London, on behalf of the organisation "Population Matters". For some reason we had an unusually low turnout for this meeting, which was disappointing considering the importance of the subject and that Stephen had come down from London especially to present the issues to us, so I have set out briefly the main points of his extensive presentation.



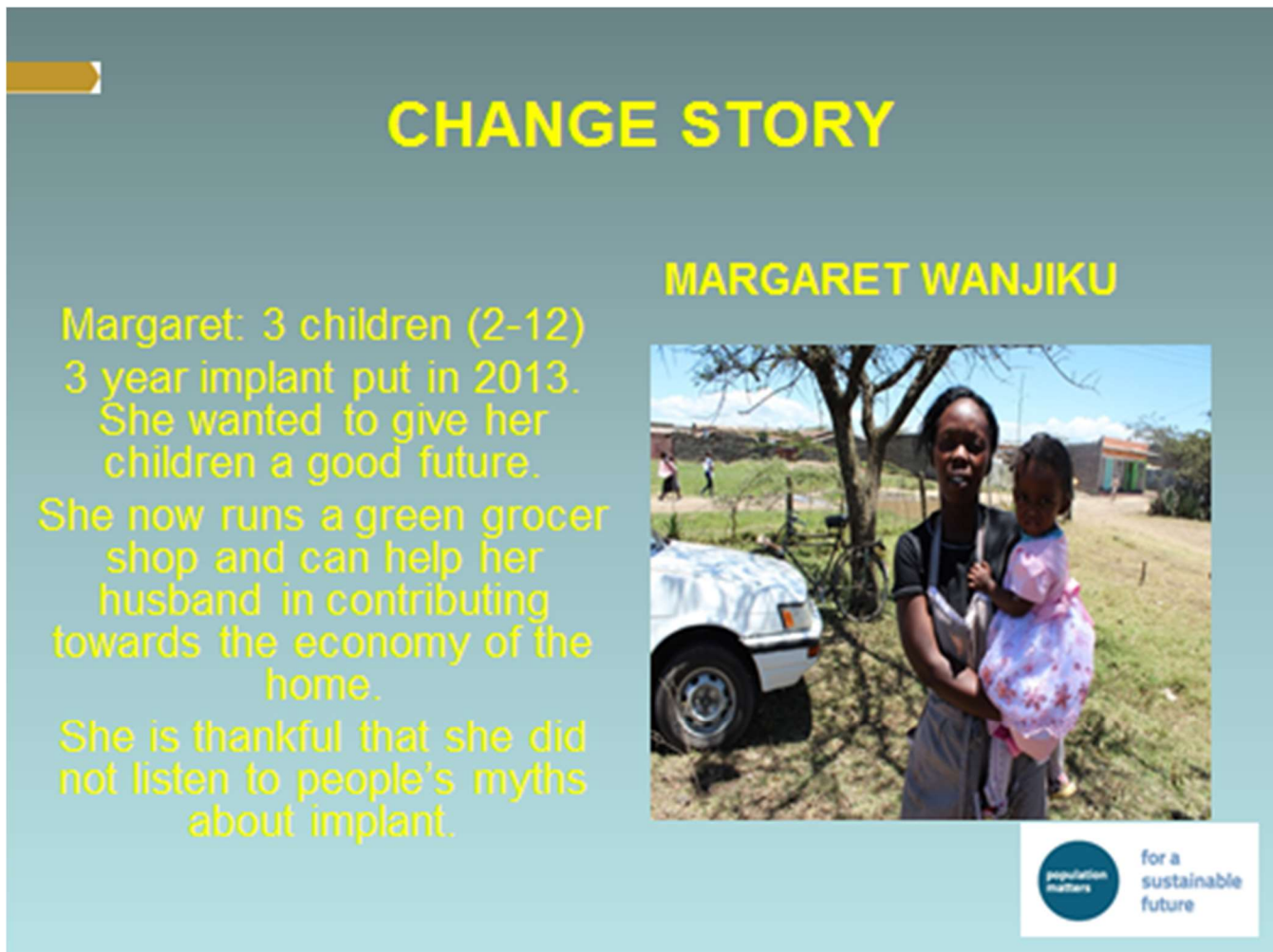
"I'm only gonna say this one more time: Our only chance is self-control."

His talk covered the problems of global over population and over consumption globally and in the UK, asking "what can be done? The current world population is 7,300,000,000!!! This number is increasing by more than 1.5 million per week – 9,000 more mouths to feed during the course of this presentation. How well can technology compensate for the negative pressures of over population and over consumption? Practical, available, environmentally-friendly actions to reduce consumption, ie: less car mileage, better home insulation, low power lights, fewer flights etc, would save 486 tonnes of carbon (from a typical value of 1656 tonnes, 30%). By a decision to have one less child, a woman and her family would save 9,441 tonnes of carbon (includes emissions of descendants). That's 20 x savings from all other eco-actions combined! Animal populations are controlled by: food availability, disease prevalence, predation, procreation level - and stabilise at sustainable levels. Human populations are controlled by: famine, disease,

war, procreation. How long can human ingenuity prevent nature taking over if we don't acknowledge and change what we are doing? Is it stupidity rather than ingenuity that drives us to support more and more people?

Humans make up 25% of the mass of the world's vertebrates, with a further 65% being animals bred for human use. YES. 90% of vertebrate mass on earth is humans or animals bred for human benefit. Overall, wild life species have declined by 52% since 1970. By taking more than nature can replenish, we jeopardise our own future. It's true that in some countries the fertility rate is actually declining. Encouraging figures were given for China, Iran, South Korea, Sri Lanka and Colombia. However in the 22 countries in arid region south of Sahara there has been a 30% increase in 10 years! Niger, the poorest country on Earth (UN), has the highest birth rate. "Political violence seems likely to intensify as growing populations battle for dwindling food supplies". The world population is slowly stabilising, but to a level where it would be difficult to maintain a good quality of life for all. With appropriate motivation, a sustainable number can be achieved, but over several generations. This requires reducing consumption AND the number of children being born NOW.


Globally, the most useful actions are Education - particularly, but not only, of women, and making family planning accessible and affordable to all who want it. Stephen showed us a collection of images to illustrate a project called "Dandelion Africa", bringing education and birth control to women in Africa. Here is one slide which illustrates the impact of this project:



CHANGE STORY

MARGARET WANJIKU

Margaret: 3 children (2-12)
3 year implant put in 2013.
She wanted to give her children a good future.
She now runs a green grocer shop and can help her husband in contributing towards the economy of the home.
She is thankful that she did not listen to people's myths about implant.



population matters for a sustainable future

There are an estimated 220 million women globally with an unmet need for family planning. The International Planned Parenthood Federation target is to halve this number by 2020. Religious objection to contraception is only one of many reasons given for non-use of modern methods of contraception. Different religions have different attitudes: **Buddhism** - Individuals take full responsibility for their actions. FP should avoid fertilisation. **Christianity - Protestant** churches mostly see contraception as a responsible way of planning a family, **Roman Catholic** doctrine says contraception is against natural law, so only the rhythm method is acceptable. **Hinduism** - No objection to contraception. **Islam** - All forms of FP acceptable in right circumstances (mothers health, disabled child, inadequate resources, harmony). **Judaism** - FP permitted (orthodox more restrictive) but should not stop sperm reaching its intended destination. **Sikh** - couples should choose FP best for existing children. Pope Francis has said the greatest aim of his Papacy is to reduce the world's poverty. The most effective single action that he could take to do this is to ease the ban on contraceptives. He directed bishops from 12 countries with the largest Catholic populations to survey the laity about their views on divorce, abortion, contraception. He called a rare "extraordinary synod" autumn 2014 on "The Pastoral Challenges of the Family." The outcome was not clear. Could this be the start of major change?

What about the situation in the UK? From a population of 42 million in 1911, we reached 63 million in 2011 and a population of 73 million is projected for 2030. What can be done? Reduce net migration (immigration – emigration). Reduce natural birth rate to mothers in UK. What can we do as individuals? Talk about and discuss over population and over consumption. Raise awareness of environmental threats. Stir up grass roots support and awareness, especially through NGOs like Friends of the Earth. Write to your MP. Join in [Population Matters](#) activities: local groups, research, campaigning & lobbying.