

November 22, 2013

BBC Complaints  
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To whom it may concern,

I am writing in response to a November 2013 article titled *Hans Rosling: How much do you know about the world?*, which I found online at [BBC News Magazine](#). I was disappointed to see that BBC, a well-known and prestigious news organization, would publish such a misguided work under the guise of “upgrading the world view” of the public. At 7.1 billion people and climbing, global population is already unsustainably high. We see the evidence in nations around the world: mass poverty, natural resource depletion, high unemployment, shortages of clean water and energy, and the dire consequences of climate change. Can we name a way that any of those issues are *improved* – even slightly – by continuing to add to our population? For Rosling to infer that we have “solved” the problems of population growth and quality of life is dangerously naïve.

As the legendary sustainability scientist Professor Al Bartlett said: “The greatest shortcoming of the human race is our inability to understand the exponential function.” Rosling’s article highlights some of the progress that has been made in humanity’s adjustment to its *symptoms* – but the problem of overpopulation remains. Even *slowed* growth is still growth. A population of 7.1 billion growing by just 1% per year is still adding 71 million people per year – 5.9 million per month – 194,520 per day – 135 per minute. ***In the one-hour duration of Rosling’s “Don’t Panic – The Truth About Population” presentation, the world added 8,105 people.*** Yet, according to Rosling, the world has no real problem with population growth?

Rosling greatly misleads the public by calling attention to the world’s average fertility rate of 2.5 children per woman. Certainly, at this casual glance, that number sounds promising – cheerful, even. However, it takes only a moment of reviewing total fertility rates within the CIA’s [World Factbook](#) to see that our problems are far from over. Of the countries listed in its 2013 estimates, *over half* have a total fertility rate over 2.0. Leading the high-fertility group is Niger, with an average of 7.03 children per woman. In its report for 2012, the United Nations’ [Human Development Index](#) (which considers overall quality of life, well-being, and child welfare) ranked Niger as the lowest of all 186 nations tabulated. So the upcoming “three or four billion new adults” that Rosling so casually dismisses – what will become of *them*, and what will *their* future look like?

Even the United States is currently growing by 1 person every 14 seconds – adding nearly the population of Chicago every year – and it is struggling with the problems of unemployment, environmental damage, and resource scarcity. The wealthiest, most powerful, and best educated nations of the world cannot afford to sustain even their *existing* population sizes – let alone further growth. Certainly the nations which are still developing face even more desperate circumstances – yet our populations all continue to climb, and this is a serious problem our world must address.

Rosling also proclaims that countries like Brazil, Mexico, and Turkey “...are now in most ways more similar to the best-off than the worst-off.” According to the 2013 OECD [Better Life Index](#), these “rising”

countries – while improving – still have a long way to go when it comes to quality of life. For each of these nations, the OECD report showed: *less than half* of adults aged 25-64 have the equivalent of a high-school degree, many employees work “very long hours” (with Turkey at a whopping 46% of employees), household net-adjusted disposable income is below average, and many citizens are unsatisfied with such basic needs as the quality of their water. Yet, according to Rosling, “the end of extreme poverty is in sight.”

Rosling’s perspective on such complex issues is startlingly arrogant: he offers a greatly oversimplified and distorted version of the problem, and provides absolutely no solutions. With this dismissive and misleading presentation declaring that we have reached a “calm” in the storm of population growth, it will be all too easy to forget this issue – instead of demand the solution of official population policies for each country. And with continued growth will come the inevitable consequences of overpopulation: further environmental, natural resource, housing, education, employment, and health crises.

The tragic results of overpopulation (global climate change, resource depletion, homelessness, unemployment, hungry and malnourished children, disease, endangered and extinct species, etc.) are far from over. The resulting human suffering continues. And the more people we continue adding to the equation, the deeper the effects will reach and the further they will spread.