

Opinion article published in Svenska Dagbladet Oct 15, 2015 (translated)

In 2017, this became one of the most read/shared such articles in Svenska Dagbladet, one of the largest newspaper in Sweden. Rosling did not write a response (which was possible).

Please note that Professor Hans Rosling passed away in February 2017.

Authors have approved this translation.

## "Rosling is wrong about the Earth's population"

**Hans Rosling has achieved an unusual degree of star status which has made it difficult to come up with criticism in any form. But here we criticize Rosling's tendency to dismiss the current serious population growth, write Karl-Erik Norrman, Carl Wahren, Lars Wedén and Anders Wijkman.**

**Hans Rosling is wrong, in particular, in stating that our planet can provide 10 billion people with reasonable welfare.**

Hans Rosling is currently often in focus, in different media - including Svenska Dagbladet. Attention has been given to both his communicative ability, his broad collaboration, and his message. Overall, Rosling has achieved an unusual degree of star status which has made it difficult to come up with criticism in any form. The question has been raised, who dares to speak up against Hans Rosling? But there are many who would wish - especially in circles with knowledge of global sustainability, aid policy and population development. Rosling's positive message has a strong effect, which in comfort liberates politicians and opinion from tackling the difficult but in all respects vital issue of the world's - especially Africa's - population growth. We certainly do not want to detract from Rosling's valuable efforts in international health care. Rather, we wish to argue against his tendency to dismiss population increase, not least in relation to the availability of arable land, water and energy.

In the public media, at public seminars, in television sofas and various entertainment programs, Hans Rosling spreads his message that the continued increase of world population from today's 7 billion to 10 at the middle of the century is not a problem. He does this in such an entertaining way, and with such enthusiasm, that not only the general public but also many decision makers think he is right. Thus, Rosling has contributed to the marginalization of interest in, and efforts for sustainable development, population, and family planning in international aid work - both in Sweden and globally.

Flaws in Rosling's message:

1. **"The world's population will automatically level off at 10 billion around 2050!"**. This is far from sure. The "demographic transition", which he bases his reasoning on, does not occur at the pace previously assumed. The UN and its population division therefore update the forecasts every other year. The growth rate is still over 80 million world citizens per year and the "turning point" is now reported to 12.5 billion inhabitants. The highlighted success stories are not only due to increased prosperity and education, but also to goal-oriented efforts like the

dissemination of knowledge about, and availability of contraception and its use. The "transition" has thus not been automatic. As a statistical enthusiast, Rosling should see this, and realize the risks if these efforts are not prioritized.

2. **"You cannot do anything about 10 billion!"** – Well, certainly you can! In many countries fertility is still very high and the use and availability of contraceptives are low. The positive trend has declined due to reduced efforts. This mostly concern African countries, but also other countries. In total, more than one billion people live under these circumstances - a number that will be doubled by at least 2050 with the current trend. Why not devote the star status to propagating for all women's right to decide over their childbirth? Of course, this must be done in conjunction with education and other welfare work, but must not - as is now - be trivialized.

3. **"It's people in the poorest countries with the greatest population growth that are particularly vulnerable to the resource shortage that our world faces!"**. The world's poverty and starvation is concentrated to the rapidly growing countries. They also suffer from negative climate impacts with resource and food shortages, political unrest, war and refugees as a consequence. Should not Rosling as public health professor realize that reduced population growth is the most effective aid a poor country can get, to give welfare to its people? Why didn't he say anything about this in his films or TV shows?

4. **Rosling is especially wrong in giving the impression that our planet can provide 10 billion people with reasonable welfare.** Did he forget that the world's arable land is shrinking; the yield there is only marginally increasing; the seas have lost most fish stocks; the dry belts on Earth are spreading; the sea surface will rise over high-productive land; the water sources of Asia - the glaciers of the Himalayans – will be reduced; the population will increase in unsustainable metropolitan areas, and so forth? The list of challenges is great. We have a greater opportunity to meet all these threats if we reduce the growth of, and stabilize the population at a lower level.

What does the world community and Sweden do about this?

- Globally, efforts for family planning have been marginalized and are in current monetary value lower than 15 years ago. The resources have gone to HIV / AIDS control. It is not wrong, but should not have taken place at the expense of family planning and dissemination of access to, and knowledge about contraception.

- From the Swedish side, family planning for international aid has been marginalized for a long time. Over the last decade, the area Sexual and Reproductive Health accounted for 5-7 percent of the total Swedish international aid, of which only a small and decreasing part is devoted to family planning. Hopefully a change is under way.

Why didn't Rosling say anything about this?

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Participants in the Population Matters Sweden network