

# One thing we have learnt this week- population increase

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[stork baby](#) Amid all the news about a certain event today the Guardian had one article that stood out on [population increase](#). The consensus up until now has been that population will peak sometime this century, probably about 2050. The team behind this research break this consensus saying that population increase will continue. For the first time?! this team have used statistics to arrive at confidence bands on the future path of any population increase. (By the way it is my view that in the Guardian link above these confidence bands are mislabelled the 95% bands should be nearest the regression line.) If the fertility rate can be reduced to 2.1 live births worldwide then in time the population would stabilise, then decline as the existing elderly population died. The good news is that in most parts of the world its already doing so with the exception of sub-Saharan Africa. However, a certain degree the effects of population depends on where you are born. The ecological effects of being born in the rich west are far greater than someone born into poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. Nevertheless increased population in this part of the world will still make demands on the food system and ecology. There is also the issue of rising incomes in developing countries leading to changes in diet, particularly higher meat intake. This has also had huge health implications. Of course population increase also has energy security and material shortage implications. The problem with population increase is that there are in many ways little we can do about it. Lowering the growth rate depends on the actions and the economies in high population growth countries. Experience has shown again and again that as countries get richer, women get better educated and access to contraception increases, the birth rate falls. The problem is as countries get richer they want to eat more, particularly meat. This might undo the previous actions. This is where we come in. In the words of Gandhi we need to "Live simply, that others may simply live". Neil Includes adapted excerpts from our new book. Image from [openclipart.org](#).

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