



### Is Uganda on the road to self-reliance or self-destruction? If the latter, how can this be stopped?

Everywhere, wherever I went and whatever I did when I visited Uganda recently, there were many young children around. They were cheerful, even delightful, but they were many!



Children appear and are delightful – but there are always so many!!!

At independence in 1962 the population was about 8 million. In 2023 the population stands at 48.5 million and is currently increasing at the rate of 2.8% per year.<sup>1</sup>

That means, the population in 2023 is now 6 times higher, or 600% higher, than it was in 1962. If the population continues to grow at the present rate, in 25 years, that is in 2048, the population will have doubled to be almost 100 million!

Can you imagine what the consequences of such a high population might be? Will there be enough

food? Will poverty increase? Will there be enough land for each family or will conflicts over land increase? Will the environment be destroyed with not a single tree in sight? Will road traffic increase so that many more people die early because of air pollution? Will there be enough health facilities and doctors, enough schools and teachers and an adequate electricity supply?

The following have been, or still are, influential factors regarding the birth rate:

- Most schools closed for 2 years during the COVID pandemic. While schools were closed, there was an increase in teenage pregnancies. Now there are many teenage mothers who do not attend school.
- After the schools opened again, many children, especially girls never returned to school.
- It has always been the case that many children, and especially girls, drop out of school between Primary 1 and Primary 7.
- It is well known that family size declines when the mother has at least completed primary school education, and ideally secondary school education.
- There are some cultural factors that encourage larger families, e.g., arranged marriages for young girls, and that a man's status is higher if he is the father of many children.
- Amongst other institutions, even today the Catholic church discourages the use of modern methods of contraception.



Women's groups like this one in Kasasa provide the opportunity to discuss many family issues. Such topics must also be discussed in mixed and men's groups.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/UGA/uganda/population-growth-rate>

Given this situation, what can we do?

I will make a few suggestions. I look forward to receiving your comments. You may not agree with my ideas. You may have better ideas!

1. Provide opportunities for groups to share their life concerns. Women's groups, men's groups, mixed groups, youth groups, groups of community leaders from religious institutions and health facilities and leaders in education such as teachers. As people talk about the issues that concern them, such as food, water, firewood, land, income, the relationship between man and wife, the question of family size is sure to arise.
2. Such discussion should include the following aims: A) Both men and women must understand how to prevent conception. B) Women must have the self-confidence to say no to sex when their partner demands it. C) Men must respect the rights of women.
3. Music, dance and drama in schools and church and community groups is a wonderful way of raising many questions. They enable the participants to challenge and question their traditions, e.g., the roles of men in the family, arranged marriages etc.



This group in Wanyange, Jinja, convened by Patrick Kiirya, had fun with traditional instruments and dance. The group also discusses life issues, for example the challenges of growing up and issues relating to climate change.



In 2019 Kihuluka Eric took me to Kanankamba Primary School in Kaliro District. I witnessed a role play taking place under the supervision of the music, dance and drama teacher. A father insisted that his daughter married an older man of his choosing. The daughter refused. All the pupils were able to give their opinion.

4. Churches must provide positive encouragement and leadership. What does it mean to be a Christian in your family and community? What does it mean about being a responsible mother or father? In this way families may be encouraged to have only so many children that they can afford to send to school, and for which they have enough land.

The same is also true of course for mosques and Moslem leaders.

5. One can campaign for the government to be more pro-active in certain ways. For example, by providing training in family planning, or even by making modern methods of contraception available free of charge in certain circumstances.

Please give me your honest reactions to these

thoughts. Do you have other ideas about how to reduce the rate of population growth? Is reducing the growth rate even important? I suggest that in Discover training activities there should always be time devoted to these issues.

In my opinion, further population growth, coupled with the climate crisis, will inevitably lead to more poverty, more environmental destruction and more conflicts. We cannot afford to ignore the problem!

Best wishes,

Keith