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Editorial note:

Faculty of Humanities Teaching and Learning Colloquium 2025 (T&L Colloquium 25) hosted by the Faculty of Humanities, North-West University, South Africa took place in Rustenburg, South Africa, from September 9-11, 2025, with a rich and stimulating programme filled with inspiring keynotes, contributed papers, workshops and panels. This bi-annual colloquium brings together educators, researchers, students, policymakers, and community practitioners. The main theme of T&L Colloquium 25 was “Reimagining the Future of Humanities Knowledge and Pedagogy: Decoloniality, Technology and the Social Justice Imperative.” This special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Society And Education (JCSE)* contains Thirteen (13) selected papers presented at T&L Colloquium 2025. Selected contributions come from within and outside of South Africa and address a wide range of issues in humanities, decoloniality, technology and the social justice.

The introductory contribution by Tshifhiwa Ignatia Mashau provides an overview of research findings and trends related to the colloquium’s focus on the role of digital humanities and technology in supporting decolonial scholarship. The author’s article which titled “Decolonising digital health promotion in African higher education institutions: A justice-oriented literature review” develops a Digital Health Justice Framework to guide equitable and culturally responsive digital health promotion in African HEIs. A research article by Eyitayo Francis Adanlawo and Mpho Chaka follows with a discussion of emerging career pathways that foreground wellbeing and sustainable development, positioning humanities graduates as key contributors to sustainable and ethical futures. The authors identify novel professional opportunities in sectors including community engagement, policy development, and social innovation. They advocate for an expanded employability paradigm that integrates humanistic knowledge with sustainable development goals, underscoring the vital role of humanities disciplines in shaping resilient, inclusive societies.

The article by Nurain Aboo Mohammed evaluating the use of QR codes as a form of assessment in teaching and learning. The author confirms the potential of QR codes as both a useful and effective medium for assessment in educational settings. Samuel Chukwudi Agunyai and Victor Ojakorotu article “Analyzing the effect of the disconnection between the curriculum and Africa’s indigenous Knowledge on effective learning” argues that Africans’ realities still encompass indigenous knowledge on various levels that can be incorporated into the continent’s school curricula.

Other articles include: Examining the Impact of Digitalization and Inequality Post Covid -19 In Africa by Phuti Ignatius Moloto and Rosinah Pillay; The Omitted Conversation: Incorporating Teacher Union Scholarship for A Transformative Educational Agenda Within the Educational Landscape. Theminkosi Zwane Trevor, David Matsepe; Examining factors behind an achieving institution: A scenario of secondary schools in Limpopo Province by Ngwako Solomon Modiba; Assessing the role of the COVID-19 catch-up recovery programme on learner performance in EFAL by Vele RJ, Tshikota and TM Badugela; Entrepreneurial Education and Sustainable Entrepreneurship Advancing Sustainable Development Goals in South Africa Through Small Businesses by Lazarus, M. and Beharry-Ramraj,

A; Mitigating Grammatical Ambiguity In English Prepositional Phrases At Dzindi Circuit Secondary School, South Africa by Farisani Thomas Nephawe; Exploring the Usage of Metadiscourse in Research Proposals Written by Honours Students by Mzamani Steven Khosa and Ernest Kwesi Klu; and Population Ethics and its implication for Developing Countries by Onwe Peter S. and Kelechi Johnmary Ani. Policy Windows and Missed Opportunities: An Institutional Analysis of How Teacher Unions Influence (or fail to influence) National Educational Policy Formulation by Zwane Thembinkosi Trevor, Matsepe David.

Editor,

Prof. Mpho Chaka

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POPULATION ETHICS AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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Abstract

This paper discusses population ethics and the implication for developing countries. Population ethics examines our moral obligations to future generations, particularly when evaluating choices that impact many generations to come. Unfortunately, both empirical climate science and moral philosophy yield concerning findings. Developing a theory that outlines our moral duties to future generations has proven challenges, and classical moral and political philosophies often lead to counterintuitive conclusions. This study adopted a qualitative research method, leveraging descriptive and analytical tools to examine existing literature on population ethics. Primary and secondary sources were consulted, including philosophical texts, policy documents, and case studies, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. By understanding the ethical implications of population trends, policymakers can make more informed decisions that balance the needs of current and future generations, ultimately fostering a more sustainable and equitable future. We recommend that investing in education, particularly for girls, is crucial. This is because educated women tend to make informed decisions about family size.

Keywords: *Population ethics, Education, Developing countries, Human well-being, Policy development.*

Introduction

To achieve sustainable development and ensure a prosperous future, developing countries must adopt population policies that balance individual reproductive rights with collective well-being and environmental sustainability, prioritizing investments in education, family planning, and healthcare. Population ethics is a branch of normative ethics that explores the moral implications of actions that impact the existence and identity of individuals. The key area of focus is

population axiology, which examines the value relationships between different possible populations, considering variations in the number and identity of individuals. This posits some ethical puzzles such as:

1. Is there a moral obligation to create additional happy individuals when all else is equal?
2. Can a population's value be enhanced by adding numerous marginally good lives?

3. Do future generations' interests justify efforts to prevent human extinction?

These questions highlight the complexities and nuances of population ethics, emphasizing the need for careful consideration of the moral implications of our actions on human existence.

Population ethics has two compelling aspects. Firstly, it enables us to prove theorems, allowing for precise and rigorous reasoning. According to (Carlson 2022) "by establishing axioms and deriving conclusions, we can uncover surprising results that follow inevitably from seemingly undeniable premises. Arrhenius's impossibility theorems exemplify this, revealing profound insights through logical demonstration" (P. 89). At times, philosophical inquiry can feel like a magic trick, where the magician is equally enchanted by their own illusions. Yet, even in moments of skepticism, the intellectual allure of these "tricks" remains captivating.

The second charm of population ethics lies in its focus on fundamental issues such as life, death, joy, misery, survival, and extinction. Our perspectives on these matters have significant implications for how we allocate our time and resources. Given the potential for our actions to shape the course of human history, careful consideration of population ethics is essential. By examining these issues thoughtfully, we can make more informed decisions about how to address pressing problems and prioritize our efforts.

When evaluating populations, it is clear that some are better than others. For instance, "a population with wonderful lives is better than one with awful lives, even if the populations differ in size. However, more complex comparisons are less straightforward" (Thomas 2018). Consider the following questions:

1. Is a smaller population with wonderful lives better than a larger population with good lives?

2. Is a population with a mix of wonderful and awful lives better than one with no lives at all?

A population axiology, which provides a better ordering of populations, would help address these questions. Unfortunately, formulating a satisfactory population axiology has proven challenging.

Several authors have proposed impossibility theorems, including Arrhenius's six theorems, "which suggest that no population axiology can satisfy certain adequacy conditions" Thomas (2018). However, recent critiques have highlighted a dubious assumption underlying these theorems: Finite Fine-Grainedness. "This assumption posits that one can transition from a very positive welfare level to a very negative welfare level through a finite number of slight decreases in welfare" Thomas (2022b).

Population growth: A Global Challenge

Population matters prioritizes individual human rights, particularly women's rights, in opposing coercive population control policies. They believe such approaches infringe upon personal freedoms and can have devastating consequences. Instead, they advocate for policies that balance reproductive rights with social and environmental responsibilities. Coercive policies can lead to forced sterilizations, unsafe abortions, and other human rights violations. Women, girls, and marginalized communities often bear the brunt of these policies, exacerbating existing inequalities. David (2010) "Studies have shown that coercive measures are not effective in achieving their intended goals, such as reducing population growth rates" (P. 69).

Malthus contends that the world's population is projected to increase by 34% by 2050, adding 2.3 billion people, with 90% of this growth occurring in developing countries. Malthus (1888) opines that "this rapid expansion raises concerns about resource depletion, environmental degradation, and the ability

of government to provide for its citizens". The world population is expected to increase significantly by 2050, putting pressure on resources, infrastructure, and the environment. Most of this growth will occur in developing countries, where fertility rates are higher and access to family planning resources may be limited. It is predicted that "population growth would be limited by famine and disease, but technological advancements have delayed this equilibrium" Malthus (1888). The question is no longer when we will reach this equilibrium, but whether we should allow ourselves to reach that point, given the potential consequences for human well-being and the environment.

Rapid population growth poses significant challenges to sustainable development, environmental protection, and social stability. This posits increased demand for essential resources like water, food, and land, leading to scarcity and competition. It leads to higher levels of pollution, deforestation, and habitat destruction, threatening biodiversity and ecosystem services. It strains on healthcare, education, and infrastructure, exacerbating poverty, unemployment, and social inequality. Rapid urbanization can lead to inadequate housing, sanitation, and services, increasing the risk of social instability and health crises. Rapid population growth drives urbanization, putting pressure on cities' infrastructure and services. This amounts to insufficient housing options, leading to overcrowding, informal settlements, and homelessness. Rapid growth can have severe environmental consequences such as: (a) faster consumption of natural resources, like water, land, and minerals, can lead to scarcity and depletion. (b) It often results in increased waste production, contributing to pollution and environmental degradation. (c) Human activities associated with rapid growth can disrupt ecosystems, leading to loss of

biodiversity, habitat destruction, and climate change.

Rapid population growth can have far-reaching consequences for socio-economic development, particularly in developing countries. This is because it creates increased competition for limited resources, jobs, and services which can exacerbate poverty and reduce opportunities for making it challenging to create sufficient job opportunities for economic mobility. It can lead to a surge in the labour force, making it challenging to create sufficient job opportunities and absorb new entrants into the workforce. This takes us to the question of the morality of population control.

The rapid population growth outlined earlier poses significant challenges to sustainable development, resource management, and environmental protection, particularly in developing countries. However, addressing these challenges through population control measures raises complex moral questions. The morality of population control is a critical consideration, as it involves balancing individual reproductive rights with collective well-being and environmental sustainability. As we explore strategies to manage population growth, it is essential to examine the ethical principles guiding these efforts, ensuring that policies prioritize human dignity, autonomy, and the well-being of both current and future generations. This examination is crucial in determining the most effective and morally justifiable approaches to addressing the global challenge of population growth.

The Morality of Population Control

Morality is a crucial factor in population dynamics, examining the impact of deaths on population trends. It focuses on the lifespan between birth and death, essentially studying the duration of life within a population. Morality significantly influences population decline. Analyzing mortality patterns provides valuable

insights into demographic conditions, enabling predictions about future changes in mortality rates and trends. By understanding mortality dynamics, researchers can better anticipate and prepare for shifts in population structure and size.

The contemporary philosophical debate surrounding population policies centres on the ethical justification of measures aimed at limiting population size, constituting a

Non-philosophical discourses on population policies hold relevance for assessing their ethical standing. Indeed, broader academic and public debates on population policies form a crucial contextual backdrop against which the moral dimensions of these policies must be scrutinized and understood.

Human activities, particularly the emission of greenhouse gases (GHG), are driving climate change. “Historically, high-income countries have been significant contributors to global warming due to their GHG emissions since the Industrial Revolution” (IPCC 2019). However, emissions from low-income countries have also seen a sharp rise in recent decades. According to IPCC (2019) “the consequences, including rising sea levels and increasingly frequent extreme weather events, disproportionately threaten low-income nations”. The intricate nature of climate change, coupled with challenging decisions on mitigation approaches and the disconnect between causes and impacts across time and space, renders it a profound topic for moral philosophical inquiry, touching on issues of responsibility, justice, and intergenerational ethics.

The notion of intergenerational ethics stands as a pivotal element within ethical considerations surrounding climate change, positing that current generations hold a duty toward future ones to bequeath a planet fit for habitation. As decisions unfold today, introspection arises: what legacy of the world do we aspire to transmit? Actions undertaken now harbor enduring impacts on successors, underscoring the imperative to ponder long-term ramifications. This viewpoint fosters a stewardship ethos

normative inquiry into the moral underpinnings of such policies. However, the ethical rationales for or against these policies often remain opaque, necessitating a reconstruction of underlying reasoning to uncover foundational principles. This opacity stems partly from the relative scarcity of contributions from analytical philosophers on this topic historically. Nonetheless, Anderson (2024) argued that:

learning toward sustainability in handling resources and nurturing environmental care, prompting contemplation on the inheritability of our choices.

Intergenerational ethics embodies a deep ethical consideration anchoring our responsibilities toward forthcoming generations amid climate change’s unfolding dynamics. “As today’s actions yield consequences stretching across time, it’s palpable that choices now cast long shadows on posterity” (Philosophy Nest, 2022, January, 10). This philosophical stance beckons contemplation extending beyond immediate gratification to the inheritance bequeathed. Envision a future envoy traversing time to address man presently – what verdict would they pronounce on the world we are crafting? Would gratitude mark their tone for our prudence, or would dismay shadow their appraisal of our oversight? The crux of intergenerational ethics hinges on acknowledging forthcoming generations’ rights commanding respect. This precipitates probing inquiries: do we wield unfettered license to exploit resources heedless of inheritors’ planetary welfare? How might equilibrium obtain between prevailing economic imperatives and ecological vitality bequeathed to societies yet unborn?

Such interrogation prods reflexive reassessment of priorities, nudging adoption of developmental paradigms inflected by sustainability. They incite scrutiny of prevailing value systems juxtaposed against stewardship exigencies spanning generations. Wrestling with these dilemmas, invites broader discourse on equity temporally extended, probing how present pursuits align or collide with future habitability. The vista of intergenerational justice thus textures decision-making with considerations transcending immediacy, embedding longer vistas of consequence and care into our collective calculus.

The primary drivers of escalating greenhouse gas emissions are identified as global economic expansion and human population growth, suggesting both factors warrant consideration in strategies to reduce emissions. Population control falls within the realm of population ethics, concerning actions influencing births and population numbers. The central inquiry here is: whether morally justifying population control for climate change mitigation is acceptable. This is not acceptable because controlling humans for climate change

mitigation is immoral, as it would impact those not responsible for climate change, and population growth exhibits self-regulatory tendencies.

According to (Greaves 2017), “philosophers have struggled to develop a normative theory for the human population that avoids objections with prevailing theories often yielding counterintuitive outcomes”. Certain theories lead to problematic implications like the ‘sadistic conclusion’, wherein they appear to devalue additional lives deemed worth living yet falling below a specific quality-of-life threshold. This illustrates the complexities and challenges inherent in constructing ethical frameworks addressing population – related moral questions, highlighting the difficulties in balancing value judgments about lives and their qualities.

Total utilitarians, or totalists’, who prioritize the aggregate well-being derived from multiplying average human well-being by population size, circumvent the ‘sadistic conclusion’ critique. However, totalism faces opposition from many population ethicists. According to (Parfit 1986):

A notable critique is totalism’s susceptibility to the ‘repugnant conclusion’, wherein it implies preference for a vastly larger population with individuals experiencing positive but extremely low well-being (lives barely worth living), over a smaller population with higher average well-being.

This outcome stems from totalists valuing additional lives even if their quality is slightly below average, leading to scenarios where enormous numbers of individuals with minimal well-being yield greater total well-being, posing ethically counterintuitive implications.

The morality of population control is a complex issue that involves balancing individual rights with the greater good of society and the environment. On one hand, controlling population growth can help alleviate the strain on resources, reduce poverty, and promote sustainable development. On the other hand, it raises ethical concerns about individual freedom,

reproductive rights, and the potential for coercion or discrimination.

One approach to population control is the Malthusian theory, which suggests that population growth tends to outstrip food supply, leading to poverty and famine. However, this theory has been criticized for its negative view of human potential and its failure to account for technological advancements and social change. Malthus’s argument is built on two fundamental premises: humans require food to survive, and the attraction between sexes is an immutable aspect of human nature. Based on these “fixed laws of nature”, Malthus (1888) posits that

“population growth outstrips the earth’s capacity to produce subsistence, leading to an inevitable imbalance. He famously illustrates this disparity by noting that unchecked population growth follows a geometric progression whereas food production increases arithmetically”. This mismatch, according to Malthus, inevitably results in widespread poverty, starvation, and suffering, mitigated only by natural checks like disease, famine, or war, or by voluntary restraint. This core idea underpins the Malthusian theory of population, highlighting the tension between human reproduction and the earth’s resources.

Malthus proposed two mechanisms to control population growth: preventative and positive checks. According to him:

Preventative checks involve voluntary measures such as birth control, delayed marriage, and celibacy, which rely on human foresight and rationality to mitigate population growth across all societal ranks. In contrast, positive checks –such as famine, disease, war, and misery – are involuntary and disproportionately affect the lower classes (Malthus 1888).

Malthus argued that while preventative checks may have some impact, they would be insufficient to curb population growth among the poor, making positive checks like famine and disease inevitable as nature’s way of balancing population with available resources.

The Malthusian theory of population remains highly relevant today, as evidenced by the widespread use of preventative measures like late marriages and contraceptives to manage population growth. However, the theory raises significant ethical concerns. The positive checks proposed by Malthus, such as famine, disease, and war, are morally reprehensible if intentionally implemented, while preventative measures like birth control and contraceptives also

raise debates about individual liberties and moral implications. Additionally, issues like abortion further complicate the ethical landscape. Despite these concerns, “Malthus’ thesis continues to apply to many countries globally, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries, as noted by Walker, who stated that the Malthusian Theory applies to all communities regardless of color and place” (Currais 2000).

In contrast, the optimum population theory seeks to find a balance between population size and resource availability, maximizing economic and social welfare. This approach recognizes that population growth can be a driver of economic development, but also acknowledges the need for sustainable resource management. The concept of optimum population, first formally introduced by Edwin Caman in the early 20th century, was further developed by economists like Lionel Robbins, Hugh Dalton, and Alexander Carr-Saunders. They explored the idea of an ideal population size that maximizes economic welfare, moving beyond the simplistic views of Malthusian alarmism or pronatalist enthusiasm. Instead, the optimum population theory seeks to find a balance between human resources and other production factors, recognizing that economic efficiency and welfare depend on this delicate equilibrium (Population & Family Health Studies, 2024).

This approach provides a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between population size and economic outcome.

Optimum population theory posits that a specific territory, with its unique resources and technological capabilities, has an ideal population size that maximizes efficiency and per capita output. This optimum is achieved when average productivity per person peaks. This theory identifies three population scenarios: Under population, where insufficient human resources lead to inefficient production. Optimum

population, where the balance between population and resources maximizes per capita output and living standards; and overpopulation, where excessive population strains resources, leading to diminishing returns and decreased per capita income and living standards (Coole 2013).

This framework highlights the delicate balance between population size and economic outcomes.

The optimum population theory offers a valuable framework for understanding the intricate relationships between population size, resource availability, and human welfare. Although its precise measurement and application can be challenging, the theory's core insight – that a balance point exists where population size maximizes welfare – remains relevant for modern policy discussions. “By acknowledging the complexities of demographic challenges, the theory provides a nuanced perspective that moves beyond extreme views, instead emphasizing the need for balance” (Wolfe 1936).

The theory's greatest contribution lies in its emphasis on finding the optimal balance, recognizing that both under population and overpopulation can hinder sustainable development. As the world grapples with diverse demographic challenges, the optimum population theory will likely continue to evolve, incorporating new understandings of environmental limits, technological advancements, and human development needs. Its enduring value lies in promoting thoughtful consideration of the complex interactions between population dynamics, economic, social, and environmental systems, and their impact on human welfare.

Ultimately, the morality of population control depends on the ethical principles guiding our actions. We must prioritize human rights, dignity, and well-being while also addressing the pressing issues of sustainability and resource management. By promoting education,

family planning, and economic development, we can work towards a more equitable and sustainable future for all. From this point, the need for an investigation into the implications of population ethics for developing countries arises.

The Implications of Population Ethics for Developing Countries

Population ethics plays a crucial role in shaping our decisions about the long-term future of humanity. The choices we make today, particularly regarding resource allocation to prevent existential risks, will significantly impact the well-being and existence of future generations. According to the total view, “the population well-being of future people is enormous, making the mitigation of existential risks a priority” (Anthis & Paez 2021). Similarly, critical level theories and average views also emphasize the importance of preserving the future, given the potential for continued progress and improvement in human welfare.

Even under different moral frameworks, the importance of ensuring a positive future remains significant. While person-affecting views may prioritize existing individuals, they still recognize the value of preventing dystopian futures or lives of suffering. Under moral uncertainty, it's prudent to consider multiple theories and take actions that safeguard the future, given the potential stakes. By acknowledging the complexity of population ethics, we can work towards a more nuanced understanding of our generations and take steps to protect their well-being.

The question of whether developed countries have a moral right to invest in population control mechanisms in developing countries is a complex one. It is argued that rapid population growth would slow development and widen the gap between the rich and the poor. Assuming that citizens of developing nations share these interests, and that slowing population growth would help

achieve them, the key issue becomes how to limit population sizes while minimizing infringement on other protectable interests. A morally acceptable approach would be for the richest countries to provide resources to limit population growth in high-fertility areas, as this would be the least coercive and burdensome method, putting fewer protectable interests at risk.

The debate over coercive population control mechanisms hinges on the time scale of implementation. According to (Rust 2010), “in the short term, coercive measures may be necessary to transition from high-fertility rates to low fertility rates, as seen in China’s one-child policy, which significantly reduced population growth. Following Hardin’s logic in ‘The Tragedy of the Commons’, coercive measures may be the least coercive option in the short term, as passive methods are often ineffective and inefficient”.

To justify coercive population control, two liberty-limiting principles can be involved: Extreme paternalism and the social welfare principle. “Extreme paternalism suggests that limiting individual freedom can benefit the individual themselves, such as increased time for each child and reduced child mortality. The social welfare principle argues that limiting freedom can benefit society as a whole, such as lower infant mortality rates and reduced stress on resources” (Rust 2010). Given the short-term nature of the limitation, the benefits may outweigh the restricted liberties. By implementing coercive measures, developed countries can help developing countries transition to lower fertility rates, ultimately benefiting both individuals and society.

Population policy is fraught with ethical challenges and uncertainty about the effectiveness of different approaches. (Rust 2010) “decisions are complicated by questions about whether to rely on individual choice, education, family planning programs, or more interventionist measures”. The evaluation of policies is

further complicated by disagreements over ethical standards, such as average versus total well-being. For instance, average utilitarianism might prioritize a smaller population with higher average well-being, whereas classical utilitarianism would focus on maximizing total well-being, potentially leading to different policy recommendations. These complexities highlight the need for careful consideration of the values and principles guiding population policy decisions.

A sound implication of population ethics for developing countries is that investing in family planning and reproductive healthcare can have long-term benefits for both individuals and society. By supporting access to contraception, education, and healthcare, developing countries can empower women to make informed choices about their fertility, leading to improved maternal and child health outcomes, increased economic opportunities, and more sustainable population growth. This approach aligns with various ethical perspectives, including those prioritizing individual well-being, social welfare, and sustainable development, ultimately contributing to a more prosperous and equitable future for all.

Conclusion

The rapid population growth outlined earlier poses significant challenges to sustainable development, resource management, and environmental protection, particularly in developing countries. As we navigate these challenges, it is essential to acknowledge the moral complexities of population control, balancing individual reproductive rights and collective well-being and environmental sustainability. To address these challenges, developing countries must population policies that prioritize investment in education, family planning, and healthcare, while respecting humanity dignity and autonomy. By doing so, we can ensure a prosperous and a equitable future for generation to come, where the needs of

both current and future population are met without compromising the environment. Ultimately, the morality of population control lies in our ability to make informed, empathetic, and forward-thinking discussions that promote sustainable development human well-being.

Population ethics explores the complex moral issues arising from the impact of our actions on future generations, including the quality, quantity, and identity of future lives. The practical implications of population ethics are far-reaching, particularly when it comes to valuing the long-term future of humanity. By prioritizing the preservation and improvement of human civilization, we can better understand the importance of mitigating existential risks that threaten our collective future. This perspective highlights the need for proactive measures to ensure a sustainable and prosperous future for generations to come, making the reduction of existential risks a critical consideration in our decision-making processes.

This argued that reducing human population growth as a means to mitigate climate change is morally problematic because it disproportionately affects populations that are not primary

contributors to climate change, and alternative solutions exist. Furthermore, population control measures would likely be ineffective due to delayed climate impacts and the self-regulatory nature of population dynamics.

Finally, population ethics in developing countries is a multifaceted issue that requires balancing individual rights, economic development, and environmental sustainability. As these countries strive to improve living standards and reduce poverty, they must also consider the long-term implications of population growth on resource availability, environmental degradation, and social welfare. Effective population policies can empower women, reduce poverty, and promote sustainable development, but they must be carefully designed to respect individual autonomy and cultural values. By prioritizing education, healthcare, and family planning, developing countries can create a more and family planning, developing countries can create a more prosperous and sustainable future for their citizens, while also contributing to global efforts to address pressing environmental and social challenges.

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