Written evidence submitted by Population Matters

1. **Summary.** We warmly support this initiative; but would propose an addition to the list of ‘missing issues from the MDGs’, namely ‘population growth’. It is a cross-cutting issue which has a significant impact on every other issue mentioned, yet is still subject within the UN system to a deeply irrational and damaging taboo.

2. **Economic Growth.** This summary of a report "More Aid plus More People does not equal Less Poverty" which we commissioned last summer from an LSE graduate student also summarises the economic case, echoing many previous more professional research findings:
"In the 20 highest fertility countries with the fastest growing populations, the number of people in absolute poverty has increased during the past three decades, despite a sharp increase in the amount of aid given. High fertility rates and consequent rapid population growth is the main cause. Three sectors of aid contributed to fertility reduction: family planning, education and economic infrastructure. But these received only 16.38% of total aid, and the key sector, family planning, received only 0.31%. Fertility reduction is key to reducing poverty, the main aim of aid. In its absence, all other aid programmes have failed in this aim, and thus been partly wasted." Wu, You LSE 2013. populationmatters.org/documents/aid_people.pdf"

3. One of the major but unrecognised drivers of this clear inverse relationship between population growth and economic development is the additional infrastructure costs required simply to maintain existing standards for ever more people. This masquerades as 'investment', but is actually a recurrent maintenance or depreciation cost, pre-empting capital funding for real investment in improving people's lives. A report we commissioned last year from a professional economist, 'More Costly UK Infrastructure for No Gain', found that, for the UK, each additional person requires £165k to be spent on housing, infrastructure, equipment and training, to extend to them the services and living standard of current UK residents. Between 1960 and 2010: maintenance of fixed capital (turnover) has cost 13.3% of UK GDP; its expansion has cost 6.9% of GDP per 1% population growth; i.e. expanding infrastructure and equipment capacity at the current population growth rate of 0.7% pa requires 4.8% of GDP pa. Applying these figures to the ONS projections for 2010-2050, population growth would cost: Low (0.24% population growth pa): 1.7% of GDP pa or £26bn pa; High (0.86% population growth pa): 5.9% of GDP pa or £106bn pa. "The cumulative cost of UK population growth to 2050, assuming constant per capita GDP, adds up to: low population growth £1.1tn; high £4.2tn; simply to maintain, current standards." O’Sullivan, Dr Jane U. of Brisbane, 2013. populationmatters.org/documents/cost_population_growth.pdf

If this same methodology were applied to the high-fertility countries, the figures would surely be striking enough to seize the attention of Finance Ministers and Heads of Government.

4. **Governance; rule of law; tackling corruption.** While these issues are less directly related to population growth than the others, it is clearly harder to resolve them when all the major cities of the high-fertility countries have rapidly growing slums full of poorly educated, under-employed and unhealthy people.
5. **Peace and Stability.** You will doubtless recall the Foreign Affairs Select Committee’s March 2014 report on "The UK’s Response to Extremism and Instability in North and West Africa". The Summary states: "Population pressures in the Western Sahel are enormous and it concerns us that politicians in the region may not see addressing them as a priority. We also see evidence of a link between rapid population growth and political instability. We believe that the UK Government should continue to impress on its international partners the need for international action to extend the availability of family planning in the Western Sahel."

6. **Putting Women and Girls First.** The links between population growth, reproductive health, maternal mortality etc are obvious and very fully documented. Clearly women cannot take control of any other part of their lives without first having control of their own fertility. But as long as 'Population' remains marginalised as a purely 'Health' issue, of little interest to other Departments, the only solutions to the vastly wider issue of population growth - namely family planning and women’s education and empowerment programmes will not receive the priority and funding they deserve.

7. **Climate Change.** Obviously, ceteris paribus, more people emit more carbon; and reducing future demand for any commodity is an alternative to increasing supply. What the UNFCCC has hitherto largely ignored is the cost-effectiveness of investment in family planning in reducing CO2 emissions. Our 2009 report "Fewer Emitters, Lower Emissions, Less Cost" compared the cost per tonne of carbon abated through family planning services (reducing future demand) and through conventional means, notably renewables (increasing future supply). It found that:

   · Family planning costs £4 to abate a carbon tonne; low-carbon technologies average £19.
   · Meeting the unmet need for family planning [then 215m, now 225m] would save 34bn carbon tonnes over 2012-50.
   · These figures ignore the impacts, 100% abated for a modest one-off cost, of an (unwanted) non-existent person’s non-existent descendants in perpetuity.

   Wire, Tom LSE 2009. populationmatters.org/documents/reducing_emissions.pdf

   Later reports, eg by Hammer and Wheeler, have broadly validated these findings.

8. **Other Population-related Development Issues.** All the other sustainability and development problems would clearly be easier to solve with a stable or reducing global population, which is, indeed, an essential (but far from sufficient) condition for any biophysically sustainable society or economy on a finite planet. It will be easier to supply food, water and energy to 2.6 billion fewer than 2.6 billion more people by 2050 (the limits of the UN projection range). Fewer rather than more people will: produce less waste and pollution; and degrade soils, destroy forests, reduce biodiversity and deplete fisheries and mineral resources more slowly.

9. **Conclusion.** Population stabilisation should be included among the Sustainable Development Goals; but it almost certainly will not, for essentially bad reasons. That is no reason, however, for DfID, which led the world so splendidly with the FP2020 initiative, to avoid it in their own forward-looking programmes.