

To feed the world, give women equal rights

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Around the world, at least a billion people are hungry or need better diets. To feed a global population projected to reach 9.6 billion by 2050, we will need to increase food production by as much as 70 percent, most analysts believe.

Achieving that goal requires civilization to address overpopulation and [overconsumption](#) through a bottom-up movement focused on agricultural, environmental and demographic planning, among other strategies, argues Stanford Woods Institute Senior Fellow Paul Ehrlich (Biology). A crucial first step is to give equal rights to women worldwide, Ehrlich says.

Ehrlich will discuss this roadmap at the annual American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Meeting in Boston. Ehrlich's talk, "Feeding All While Avoiding a Collapse of Civilization: Science's Greatest Challenge," will be part of a symposium called "Global Food Security in Relation to Climate, Population, Technology, and Earth Changes" .

The talk will touch on themes from a recent Proceedings of the Royal Society commentary, "Can a Collapse of Global Civilization Be Avoided?" that Ehrlich and his wife Anne Ehrlich, also a Stanford biologist, wrote.

The report calls for improving agricultural practices, replacing fossil fuels and giving women equal rights to enlist more brainpower in finding food supply solutions and to slow birth rates.

"There is widespread agreement that the evolving food situation is becoming very serious," Ehrlich said. "But virtually all such warnings, in my view, underestimate the potential impacts of climate disruption on the [food system](#), the way the energy situation may negatively interact with producing enough [food](#) and the progressive ecological deterioration of the agricultural enterprise. Perhaps most important, virtually all analyses simply treat the need to feed an additional 2.5 billion people by 2050 as a given."

Instead, Ehrlich says, there should be more focus on slowing population growth. "A program of improving the status of women everywhere and supplying all sexually active people with access to modern contraception and back-up abortion would be relatively quite cheap and would greatly reduce the numbers that must be fed."

Provided by Stanford University

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