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Dr John Bongaarts is Vice President of the Population Council in New York and was part of the core research team behind the Institution of Mechanical Engineers' report, Population: **One planet, too many people?**

Herewith are extracts of an interview carried out by the Institution. Media (only) wanting a digital copy of this transcript should email media@imeche.org

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What has been your involvement in the report?

I have written parts of the report that deal with the population trends, overall growth in population, urbanisation, trends in the young and the old, and the energy trends.

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What is the biggest challenge facing us?

The report is crucial because it lends the engineering profession a voice to an important global debate that is ongoing. This, met with a rising population and with rising consumption everywhere, means we are running out of the ability to grow food, to have water and energy, to keep the standards of living from rising in the future. In addition, we find that societal infrastructure is not keeping up and is, in fact, crumbling. This is an urgent situation that needs to be addressed and having the engineering societies join the demographers and the environmentalists I think is a very important step forward.

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Whose responsibility is it to take action? Government, the public or large international corporations?

I think all of the above. It is particularly important that this reaches the governments and not only to governments of poorer countries where these problems are more severe. Funding is not available to invest in large infrastructure projects (in newly developed nations) and they need financing from international communities. I think for example the World Bank is a very important actor in this whole field and they should read this report, so if contact can be made with them, that would be good.

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What should be done now in relation to future action?

Well the report should be distributed as widely as possible. To have the public knowledgeable about it (the report) is of course crucial. Political actors in every country should bring this to the attention of their government as the problems are mostly here in the poorest countries where the most rapid population grows, in Africa and Asia. So in Europe we are relatively or in the United States we are relatively well off, but the rest of the world is struggling to deal with these issues and we have recently seen rapid increases in prices of oil, of various food commodities. This is a sign that the global environment is having difficulties meeting the demands that we put on it.

The report discusses an engineering knowledge 'swap-shop'. Is this a good idea?

JB: I think that would be terrific. We need to come up with the best ideas that we can find right now. For example in the energy area we have a global warming problem and this is largely caused by concentration of carbon dioxide rising in the atmosphere. Nuclear energy is a part of the solution and for that we need better technologies, trying to come up with the most effective and least dangerous approach to this would be, require engineers to put their heads together and design new plans and reactors. So we need everybody to get involved, it is not a single actor, it requires a concerted action from governments and international agencies around the world.