

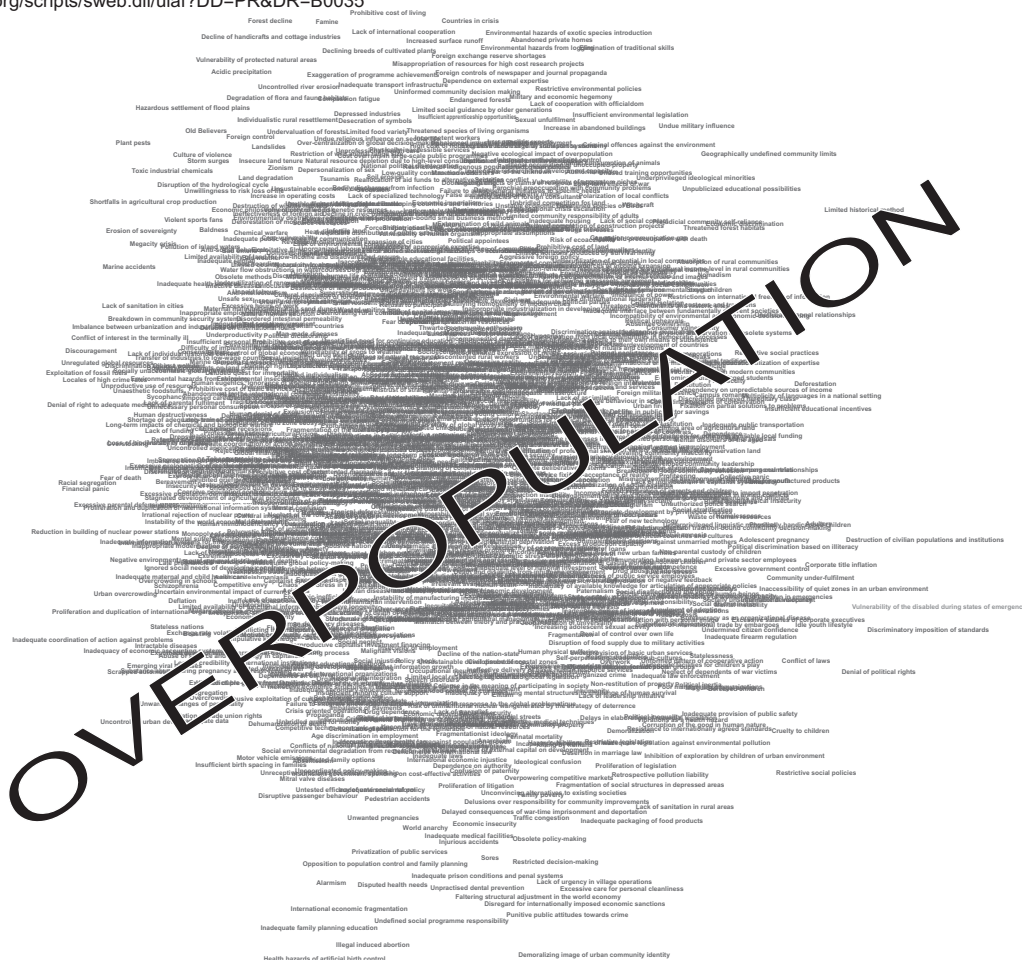
Figure 10.2.6.
Unsustainable population levels

Database: World Problems and Issues

Link type: aggravates problems

Network nodes: 1501

UIA database: <http://db.uia.org/scripts/sweb.dll/uiaf?DD=PR&DR=B0035>



Some exaggerated claims ...

1 Population growth is probably the greatest long-term threat to achieving ecological stability either locally or throughout the world. Each year 127 million children are born, each year 95 million come of school age, and each year 19 million people reach age 65. These totals are likely to rise steeply in the years ahead as more young adults swell the ranks of potential parents, and improved medical care advances life expectancy. At 2% a year, the rate of world population growth is now more than double the rate in 1940. It may still rise. Each nation, each community, each family must assess in detail how these trends affect their hopes for higher living standards, a better education, and greater health and happiness.

! In 1992, a joint USA/UK study concluded: If current predictions of population growth prove accurate and patterns of human activity on the planet remain unchanged, science and technology may not be able to prevent either irreversible degradation of the environment or continued poverty for much of the world.

! Excessive population growth diffuses the fruits of development over increasing numbers instead of improving living standards in many developing countries.

! Under certain conditions population growth may stimulate technological innovations or improvements. Such benefits may be outweighed by disadvantages when human institutions, market mechanisms and technology do not adapt quickly to changing conditions. Environmental circumstances may not favour innovations intended to respond to population growth, such as intensive agriculture in depleted soils which cannot support it.

! On current trends the years to 2012 will see a world population increase of 2 billion, namely twice the 1992 population of China. It will be the largest population increase ever during a 20-year period and will put extreme pressure on developing countries where birthrates are generally high and resources are stretched most thinly.

During the next decade India and China will each add to the planet about ten times as many people as the United States will – but the stress on the natural world caused by new Americans may exceed that from new Indians and Chinese combined. The expected 57.5 million new people added to the US population during the 1990s will add more greenhouse gases to the atmosphere than the roughly 900 million new people in developing countries.

! Homo sapiens will keep growing in number, as everyone agrees, and that growth may have disagreeable consequences. But those consequences seem less likely to stem from the environmental collapse the apocalyptists predict than from the human race's perennial inability to run its political affairs wisely. The distinction is important, and disarming.

and counter-claims

! Population growth is a false issue deriving from a neo-colonial approach by the developed countries to hold down the developing countries for their own self-interest or, in extreme cases, as a subtle form of genocide. It is also used by developed countries as a diversionary, superficial form of reform to alleviate the present corrupt system. and to delay or defer the needed revolution.

! Under correct economic conditions (such as public control of the means of production) population will take care of itself. The environmental consequences of population growth are due to the affluence and consumption of developed countries, which use up resources and produce pollution.

! It is not the total numbers which are important, but rather their distribution over the land area. It is the concentration of people in urban conglomerations which is the real problem.

! Population increase is advocated by some countries as a means of ensuring national sovereignty, and the minimum population requirements needed for a country to become a regional or world power.

Overpopulation is a relative concept. It signifies that, at a given stage in international development, there is a surplus of manpower, in the sense that the productive margin of work in these regions is nil or so low that it is no incentive to work. The phenomenon can of course be attributed to exaggerated

population growth, but is also, more than anything else, a consequence of the endemic inadequacy of the stock of capital worldwide.

! On average, standards of living have improved throughout the world. Between 1960 and 1990, as world population went from 3 billion to 5.3 billion, infant mortality dropped and life expectancy, literacy, per capita income, food production and nutrition all increased.

¹ The United Nations projects world population to grow from 6.1 billion in 2000 to 9.4 billion in 2050, with all of the additional 3.3 billion coming in the developing countries. However, it is doubtful that these projections will materialize as population pressures increasing transform routine management situations into full-scale humanitarian crises.

! Within 20 years the AIDS epidemic may turn current high population growth rates negative. For example, in Uganda, where 1.5 million people out of a population of 16 million were thought to be HIV positive in 1992, the (then) 3% population growth rate could fall to below zero after 2002 (with more people dying than being born). This means that by 2007, Uganda would have 20% fewer people than it had in 1992. The AIDS epidemic had not occurred. The population would be 20.3 million instead of 24 million. Tanzania, Malawi and Rwanda, all in the Central and East African belt where AIDS has hit hardest, would be similarly affected.