

7 Billion People!! Are We Too Many?

A month ago our world celebrated the birth of its 7th billionth baby. It made headline news globally and symbolic celebrations marked this milestone around the world. However the reality that we need to reflect upon is, can our planet sustain this huge number, can it address the need of water, food, housing, electricity, medical facilities and other necessary requirements as the world population grows? The sad reality is that while some enjoy the bounties our planet earth offers, many of these 7 billion people live in extreme poverty having no access to even clean drinking water, proper nutrition and basic medical care. What makes the situation even more critical is that according to the UN, the world's population will be hitting 8 billion by 2025 and 10 billion by the end of this century. The way things are today, providing food, water, shelter and energy for these increased billions is a very serious concern. So how do we cope with this?

We know that:

- Each year the world population increases by 80 million.
- The world population has doubled since 1965. It is projected to rise to 9.3 billion by 2050.
- India and China together account for over a third of the world's total population.
- Urban population has grown 45% since 1992.
- The number of mega cities with at least 10 million people has grown from 10 to 21 since 1992.



For centuries humans have successfully multiplied. We have been growing exponentially due to improved health care which has extended life expectancy and reduced infant mortality rates. New scientific research has found cures for many illnesses and vaccines have prevented epidemics. Population growth is generally linked to global poverty, environmental damage, economic decline and political turmoil. We are told again and again that over-population is impacting our earth's ability to survive. Without doubt the planet is faced with unimaginable pressures, but is it all just due to our growing numbers or are there other contributing factors such as how we choose to live, how we produce, consume and most importantly, how we waste our resources? It may be too late to keep the 7 billion from being born but it is not too late to change how we produce and consume food and energy.

We need to understand that the growing population is only part of the dilemma we face; the real problem is the growing consumption patterns of the developed countries. Their standard of living is now being set as national goals by many developing countries. Just imagine if China follows the consumption patterns of the USA, the impact will be far worse than the population increase in the African continent.

If the world's wealthiest 20% consume approximately 80% of the world's resources, while the rest of humanity shares the remaining 20% of resources, how can the population be at fault for the growing level of poverty?

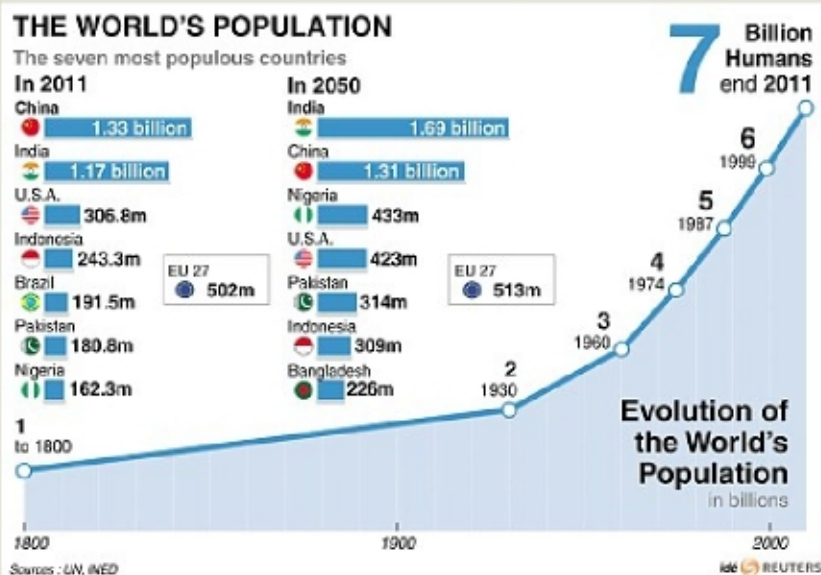
Global carbon emissions continue to rise, with 80% coming from 19 countries that have negative or extremely low fertility rate. Places where population has been growing fastest are those where carbon dioxide has been growing most slowly. Of the world's population, 63% growth took place in regions with very low emission levels.



Americans top the list of our planet's mega consumers, using a full 25% of the world's energy even though they are only five percent of the global population. Combined with other major industrialized nations, they waste 222 tons (almost 200,000 kg) of food every year! This level of consumption just isn't sustainable and it has more bearing on climate change and global warming than population.



"Seven billion population is a challenge, at the same time an opportunity, depending upon how the international community prepares for that challenge." U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.



Food production has risen by 45% since 1992 due to the increased use of fertilizers, yet 50% of the hungriest people are farming families. Each day 22,000 children die due to conditions of poverty while two billion people live in poverty, more than the population of the entire planet less than 100 years ago. Today there are more people suffering from starvation in the world than ever before in history.

Out of the world's total population, 12% uses 85% of all water resources and none of this percentage lives in the developing world. Diminishing glaciers due to global warming are influencing the current sea level rise thus threatening the well being of nearly 1/6 of the world population. Global forest area has decreased by 300 million hectares since 1990. Such is the stress our planet is under due to our own actions. Besides managing our population growth we most definitely have to alter our consumption patterns if we want to save ourselves from a catastrophe in the very near future.



The world may be concerned at the arrival of the 7 billionth person but let us accept this as a challenge and work for a solution by consuming less energy and switching from fossil fuels to alternative energy sources, wasting less of everything and living a lifestyle that will help to maintain a planet in which every human being has a chance to lead a productive and prosperous life and to make sure that the planet's resources continue to be in good shape for the future generations. Let's do our share and become a worthwhile member of this 7billion club. Our planet relies on us to work towards lessening its burden by making conscious decisions, both individually and collectively.