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A Socioeconomic Analysis of Overpopulation: Causes, Effects and Solutions

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ABSTRACT

Population control is a goal which numerous advanced societies concentrate on but not many have implemented solutions to combat the various effects of it . Deaths due to food, water, environmental shortages, crime, and war have been rising. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, the world population will reach 10 billion by 2050, and regular climate changes are happening as a result. As a result, they expect that cultivating crops would be a difficult challenge. Food is linked to climate change and food cannot be grown in an unsuitable climate. In this paper, the causes, effects and potential solutions to the problem of overpopulation are discussed. Overpopulation has repercussions on society and the socioeconomic impact of it has been analysed.

Keywords: *Overpopulation, causes, effects, solutions.*

I. INTRODUCTION

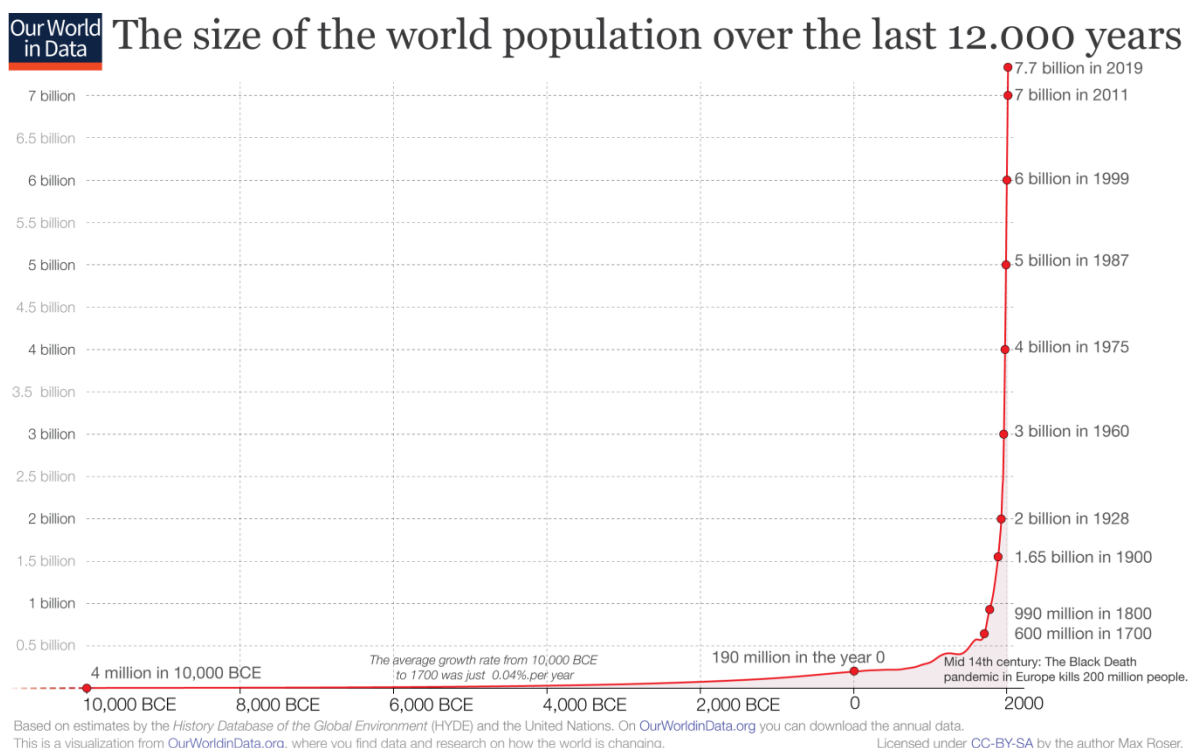
Civilization has reached the stage where it has started to significantly impact the vitally important planet-wide environment that supports us : the biosphere. We humans have generated a population size which is far beyond the limits of what Earth can sustain. In past birth and death rates have always been able to balance each other thus, allowing us to maintain a stable population growth rate. But since the Bubonic Plague of 1400s, there has been a steady increase in the population. Most people seem to focus on short-sighted goals by enriching themselves, overconsuming resources rather than paying attention to the environment for long-term goals. This is the reason why the planet is running out of resources and with every increment in population number, the environment suffers. Modern world tried to identify a solution by inventing birth control pills, and engaging in population control through eugenics. Despite these efforts it seems that we are losing this battle. As of today world population stands 7.9 billion and a part of this chunk does not have access to basic human needs. Food and water scarcity, lack of job opportunities, inadequate education are all results of overpopulation which in turn leads to global inequality. Unequal distribution of natural resources, financial means,

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and individual rights give rise to poverty and characterize the global culture as avaricious. It would be imprudent to neglect the dynamic nexus of issues, such as population growth, overconsumption by the wealthy, resource depletion, environmental degradation, and societal inequity, all of which are clearly known to mankind. The primary objective of this research paper is to address the issue of overpopulation and to identify its causes and effects. I will also discuss the effective solutions to counter overpopulation.

II. HISTORY



Since the beginning of human's existence, when humans had no clue about agriculture, it is believed that the world population was roughly near one million³. This population growth increase when human shifted from hunting and gathering to farming which helped him increasing his food supplies⁴. Population then increased to 250 million in the year A.D. 1.⁵

In between some intellectuals like Plato tried to identify this situation. He tried to address this problem in the *Republic*, where he mentioned the concept of "population control" suggesting that the 'guardian' class should be bred to rule, while the 'unfit' left to die. He further proposed to cap city-state population level upto 5,040 citizens by utilizing birth control.⁶ Aristotle further

³VANESSA BAIRD, *THE NO-NONSENSE GUIDE TO WORLD POPULATION* 24 (New Internationalist) (2011).

⁴ DAVID HOWARD DAVIS, *IGNORING THE APOCALYPSE : WHY PLANNING TO PREVENT ENVIRONMENTAL CATASTROPHE GOES ASTRAY*, 93-97 (Praeger) (2007) [hereinafter "HOWARD"].

⁵ *Id* at 2.

⁶ *Id* at 3.

acknowledged the idea that impaired babies should be killed.

During the colonial times, it is observed that French inhabitants of Canada reproduced at a higher rate. As *Davis* records that population between 1680 and 1784 population changed from 10,000 to 134,000. While in British colonies the population grew six folds. Before the advent of industrial revolution life expectancy was 25 years while infant mortality rate was 400 per 1,000⁷. With the onset of industrial age the population began to increase owing to technological innovations, sanitation, and medical treatments that succeeded in extending life expectancy of people suffering from illnesses such as cancer. It was widely believed that a greater population made a country wealthier. To quote The Prussian king, Frederick II, during 1770's claiming "the number of the people makes the wealth of states"⁸. But his claims were opposed by some physiocrats who claimed that land was the only source of economic development and that population growth would inevitably lead to widespread poverty and suffering.

After the II World War, population increase became abrupt and out of control. Paul Ehrlich, a famous biologist, in his book *The Population Bomb*, wrote about the long-term famine that will occur as the population grows.⁹ Ehrlich cited China's one-child policy as a possible solution for countries with growing populations, and he singled out India as a country that is struggling to contain its population and contributing the most to overpopulation.

III. CAUSES OF OVERPOPULATION

Earth is home to more than 7.9 billion people. According to an UN report, with the current rate of growth in population, we can hit a mark of 11 billions by 2100.¹⁰ For the time being, the world population continues to grow at a rapid rate of 80 million people each year. Various causes of overpopulation are addressed below.

1. Declining Death Rate

The difference between the total birth and death rates in populations is at the root of overpopulation. Had the number of children born each year equaled the number of adults who die, the population would have stabilized. According to the World Health Organization, the global child mortality rate has decreased, with 4.1 million infant deaths in 2017 compared to 8.8 million in 1990. (WHO). Of course, this is good news for public health but accompanied with various other causes, it is leading to overpopulation.

⁷REBECCA STEFOFF, *OVERPOPULATION*, 28 (Chelsea House) (1993) [hereinafter "STEF OFF"].

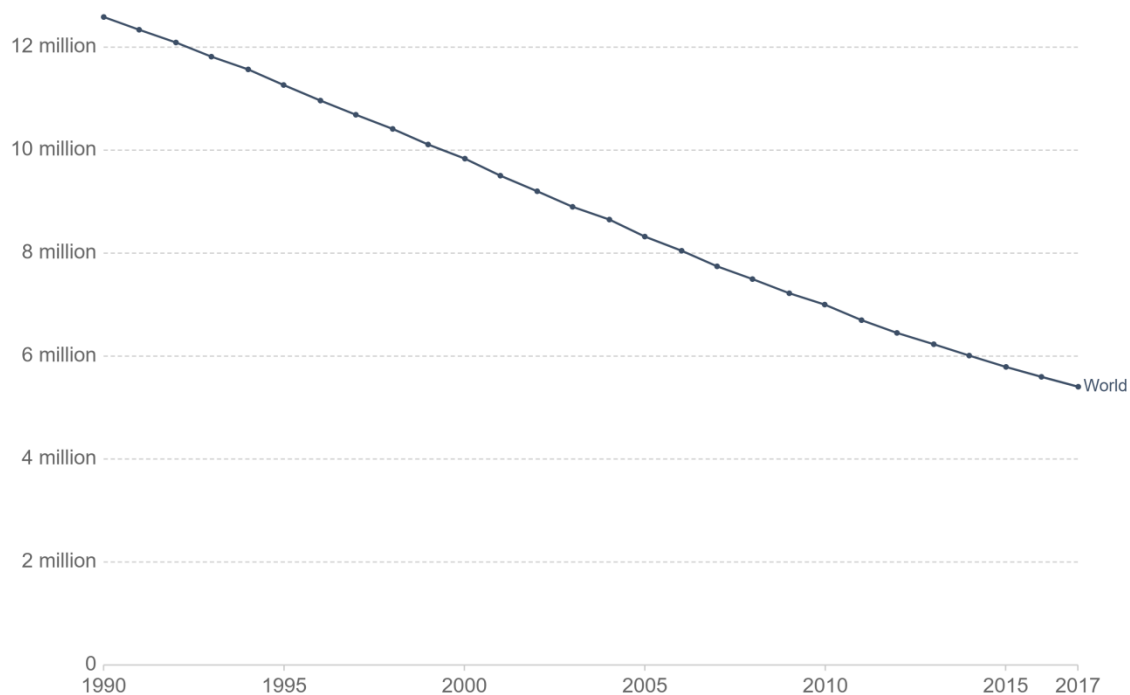
⁸ STEFOFF, *supra* note 5 at 33.

⁹ PAUL R EHRlich, *THE POPULATION BOMB*, 134 (Bucaneer Books) (1971).

¹⁰ World Population Prospects 2019, UN report <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/world-population-prospects-2019.html> (last visited- Ma 23, 2021).

Number of child deaths

The number of deaths of children under five years old.



Source: UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation

OurWorldInData.org/child-mortality/ • CC BY

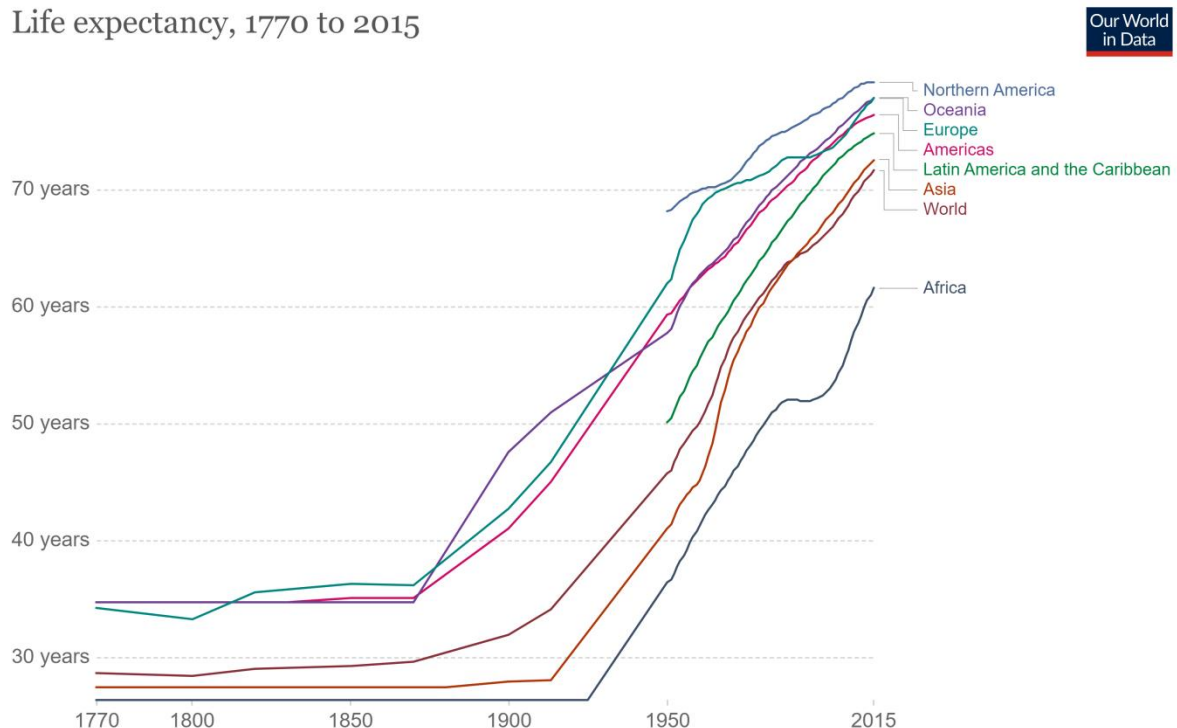
When it comes to overpopulation, it's important to remember that while many factors will raise the death rate for a shorter period of time, those that raise the birth rate do so for a longer period of time.

According to a study released in 2013 titled *Child and Infant Mortality*, the world has made significant progress in lowering infant mortality rates. From the 1800s until 1950, the mortality rate has been reduced by half, from 43 percent to 22.5 percent, and from 1950 to 2015, it has been reduced to 4.5 percent. The dramatic reduction in child mortality rates has resulted in a rapid increase in the world's population.

2. Improved Life Expectancy

The Industrial Revolution brought with it a revolution in the world of medicine. Technological advancement in the field of medical sciences has primarily disturbed the balance between the births and deaths. Scientific progress allowed us, from then onward, to overcome diseases that previously could only end in death. Earlier births and deaths used to balance each other, but today, an advanced healthcare system prevents deaths and thus births overcome deaths, hence leading to overpopulation.

Life expectancy, 1770 to 2015



Source: Riley (2005), Clio Infra (2015), and UN Population Division (2019)

OurWorldInData.org/life-expectancy • CC BY

Note: Shown is period life expectancy at birth, the average number of years a newborn would live if the pattern of mortality in the given year were to stay the same throughout its life.

Science was able to develop more efficient methods of food production, allowing families to feed more mouths. Furthermore, medical science has made numerous breakthroughs that have enabled them to conquer a wide range of diseases. The invention of vaccines and discovery of antibiotics such as penicillin saved thousands of lives and were a key factor in unfettered population growth.

The average life expectancy, over the globe, has risen from 40 to 65.5 years over the past century. In India, life expectancy of males and females was only 22.6 years and 23.3 years, respectively in 1900. In the last 100 years improved medical facilities and technological advancement has increased the life expectancy to 60.3 years and 60.5 years, respectively for the Indian males and females. In Japan and Sweden, life expectancy is quite higher, being 82.1-84.2 for females and 77-77.4 for males, respectively.

3. Underutilized Contraception

Though the availability of contraceptives is widespread in developed countries, poor planning on both partners' parts can lead to unexpected pregnancies. According to the UN Population Division, the global fertility rate has slowly declined over time, from an average of 5 children per woman in 1950 to 2.4 children per woman today. Along with that encouraging trend, contraceptive use has risen gradually across the world, from 54 percent in 1990 to 57.4% in 2015. Yet, contraception, on the whole, is still underutilized. For example, according to the

WHO, an estimated 214 million women in developing countries who want to avoid pregnancy are not using modern contraceptives.¹¹

These women don't use contraception for a number of reasons, including social expectations or religious values that discourage birth control, misunderstandings about negative side effects, and a lack of agency for women to make sex and family planning decisions. Between 2010 and 2014, an estimated 44% of pregnancies were accidental around the world¹². More women having access to and control over family planning approaches will help to flatten the population curve.

4. Industrial and Agricultural Revolution

Technological revolutions and population explosions occur at the same time. The industrial and agricultural revolutions have contributed significantly to the overpopulation problem. Since the production of food and other goods became quite due to the use of machines and the use of fertilizer and pesticides, people were able to raise more children, which in turn also raised more children.

Scientific research and technological advancements, on the other hand, resulted in more productive agricultural development, resulting in year-round crops, more resistant plants, pesticides, and so on.... things that Malthus had overlooked while formulating his apocalyptic theory predicting the extinction of the human race. Improvements in fishing and livestock practices have helped to increase the amount of food available to feed the population.

5. Poverty

At first sight, this seems to be in contradiction to logical reasoning. Why should poverty be a factor in population growth? The explanation for this is that many poor people do not have access to government-sponsored pension plans. As a result, when they are no longer able to work, they must rely on their children to support them.

As a result, the number of children in developing countries is also much higher than in developed countries. Furthermore, children are often required to work on their parents' fields in order for them to be able to farm their land, which leads to population growth.

Poverty by itself does not result in population growth, but when combined with a lack of proper education, it can become a sure-fire recipe for a population boom. Poor, uneducated families

¹¹ WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/family-planning-contraception> (last visited May 21, 2021).

¹² Andreea A Creanga, Duff Gillespie, Sabrina Karklins & Amy O Tsui, *LOW USE OF CONTRACEPTION AMONG POOR WOMEN IN AFRICA: AN EQUITY ISSUE*, WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION (last visited May 21, 2021).

will choose to have a child because adding another member to the family will only mean more hands to work. This can have a negative effect on both the economy and the environment. To meet the needs of the people, this puts a lot of strain on the already burgeoning population and the already deteriorating climate.

The impact is so widespread that the United Nations predicts that the world's forty-eight poorest countries will be the largest contributors to population growth. According to their projections, the combined population of these countries will reach 1.7 billion in 2050, up from 850 million in 2010¹³.

6. Religious Concerns

Another explanation for overpopulation is because many people feel that aborting children or even using contraception is a sin. As a result, population increase is unavoidable in the absence of contraception.

Many religions have rejected birth control for numerous superstitious purposes, despite the practical importance of birth control, the benefits of disease prevention, the spiritual obligation we have towards our children's futures, and the responsibility we have with regard to the stewardship of our world. On the other hand, it's worth noting that all of the pioneers of contraception were freethinkers.

Why have religions made it a point to prohibit contraception? The answer can be found in a kind of religious survival of the fittest. Since most religious people simply follow their parents' religion¹⁴, religions that allow parents to have more children will have a larger and longer-lasting following. According to Barber religions encourage fertility by promoting marriage at a far younger age than non-religious people.

For much of its history, the Catholic Church has strongly opposed contraception. In particular, it has opposed any method that intentionally prevents childbirth between a married man and woman. The Catholic Church still strongly opposes the use of condoms in Africa, which is home to 135 million Catholics¹⁵. Even the tenets of Hinduism also forbid abortion except when it is necessary to save mother's life. Some religious texts in Hinduism compares abortion to the killing of a priest or a sin worse than killing one's own parents.

¹³ Poverty and Overpopulation, THE BORGAN PROJECT, <https://borgenproject.org/poverty-and-overpopulation/> (last visited May 21, 2021).

¹⁴Vexen Crabtree, WHAT CAUSES RELIGION AND SUPERSTITIONS, THE HUMN TRUTH FOUNDATION (May 23, 2021) <http://www.humanreligions.info/causes.html>.

¹⁵*The pope in Africa: Sex and sensibility*, THE ECONOMIST (Mar. 21, 2009) <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2009/03/19/sex-and-sensibility>.

7. Lack of Education

Overpopulation is often exacerbated by illiteracy. Many who lack education are unaware of the importance of limiting population growth. They are unable to comprehend the negative consequences of overpopulation.

Overpopulation is more common in developing countries than it is in developed countries. Undeveloped countries also lack proper education about reproduction and preventive measures of reproduction, and as a result of this lack of proper education about precautions, the world's population, especially in underdeveloped countries, is rapidly increasing.

In underdeveloped countries, people are mostly not aware of preventive measures to avoid pregnancies. As a result, there could be families that have more kids than they can afford to feed. It also has a negative impact on one's quality of living. Many times, it is the government that fails to raise awareness and educate the public about the current overpopulation problem and possible solutions. If people would be well informed about the consequences of having overpopulation they might start using preventive measures.

Sex education is the need of the hour. Adolescents and youngsters are needed to be taught about sex, and how to use contraceptives as a measure to prevent unwanted pregnancy as well as preventing harmful STD's.

8. Lack of Family Planning

A substantial number of people in most developed countries are illiterate, live in poverty, and have little to no knowledge of family planning. Furthermore, getting their children married at a young age raises the likelihood of them having more children. These people are unable to comprehend the negative consequences of overpopulation, and a lack of adequate education leads them to delay family planning.

Though many advanced and developed nations across the globe have adopted family planning in their policies and to an extent it has been quiet helpful for them. Yet under-developed and developing countries face a lot of problems. Countries like India started family planning decades ago but still the problem persists because family planning policies remain in paper only. They have not been able to come in force.

9. Migration

Unchecked immigration into countries may result in overpopulation to the point that those countries' populations outnumber their resources. This is especially problematic in countries where immigration far outnumbers emigration.

If people from different countries move to a certain part of the world and settle there, the region will undoubtedly suffer from the negative effects of overpopulation. In certain parts of the world, the influx of refugees causes an imbalance in population density. Currently, over half the global population live in cities of more than 300,000 inhabitants and which are expected to continue growing until they reach 70% of the population.

Many people choose to relocate to developed countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, where the best medical, educational, protection, and jobs opportunities are available. As a result, certain individuals gravitate to those areas, ultimately overcrowding them. Though the total population remains unchanged, the density of the population increases, making the area overcrowded.

10. Child Labour

Child labour is still widely used in many parts of the world, as distressing as it may be to hear. According to UNICEF, about 150 million children are currently working, primarily in countries with few child labour laws.¹⁶ Children may be seen as a source of income by poorer families as a result of this. Furthermore, children who start working too early miss out on important educational opportunities, especially when it comes to birth control.

Its hard to say whether child labour causes overpopulation or overpopulation causes child labour. But child labour gives an incentive to poor families in under-developed countries to produce more offspring because children there are a major part of workforce.

IV. EFFECTS OF OVERPOPULATION

Several lines of evidence highlight the importance of Overpopulation as a determining factor in a variety of social, economic, and political issues. Concerns about the economy and the environment are attracting a lot of attention. there is a lot of public, political, and media interest throughout the world, providing a one-of-a-kind window of opportunity to put the issue of overpopulation in a spotlight. The word "overpopulation" refers to a situation in which the world's or a region's population is so high that the people living there are suffering. In other words, the population of an area or world exceeds its carrying capacity—the maximum number of humans, other living species, or crops that can be sustained without causing environmental harm. Food scarcity, inadequate access to healthcare and other public services, overcrowding, and high unemployment could be among their problems.

1. Employment

¹⁶UNICEF, https://www.unicef.org/media/media_69610.html (last visited May 22, 2021).

The need to create jobs is a top priority for governments all over the world. High levels of unemployment may trigger economic and social instability because jobs are the key mechanism by which individuals gain earnings that enable spending and healthy economies. The growing size of the labor force as a result of simple population growth is at the heart of this struggle for constant job generation. Between 1980 and 2009, the world's labor force increased from 1.9 to 3.2 billion people, according to the World Bank database.¹⁷ According to the United States Census Bureau database, there are 560 million people aged 55 to 64 worldwide and 1.2 billion aged 5 to 14.¹⁸ If retirement age is set at 64, and the positions of retirees are fully filled by the young, then basic demographics predict a 640 million work deficit over the next decade. Failure to address this rising labor shortage could increase unemployment, despite the fact that some governments have responded by lowering relative wages. For example, despite the fact that labor productivity has increased by 70% since the 1970s, average salaries have remained stagnant and have actually decreased by 20% among unskilled workers in the United States, as per to statistics from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics¹⁹. Harnessing the new labor supply will remain a problem everywhere, because widespread availability of advanced technology will tend to reduce demand for human labor; labor shortages resulting from declining natural resources, especially land for agriculture, which is the main sector of employment; and job outsourcing due to globalization in developed countries. The task of absorbing the labor supply, whether by unemployment or wage reductions, will only become more difficult as our population grows.

2. Public debt

Budget deficits are another big political problem for governments around the world. Apart from corruption, the struggle to provide basic social security for the young and elderly without imposing a tax burden on the workforce is resulting in that debt. Both ends of the population age pyramid put a strain on government budgets. On the one hand, there are the youths and the need for financial and medical support, as well as investment in human capital, i.e., creating the conditions for the generation of knowledge and training in skills needed for technological innovation and competitiveness in a globalized world, as well as avoiding future economic downturns due to lower tax rates paid by adults. The relationship between population and economic growth has been widely discussed among two groups: (1) those who see overpopulation as a motivating economic force and a means of innovativeness and imagination

¹⁷ <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator>.

¹⁸ <https://www.census.gov/#>

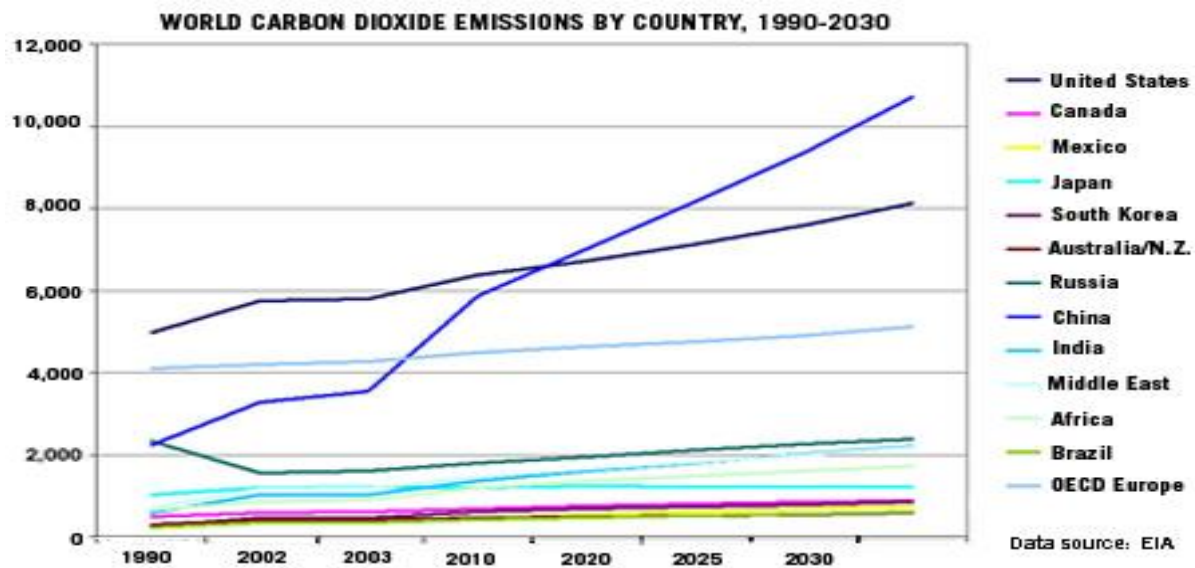
¹⁹ <http://www.bls.gov/>

capable of enhancing Earth's capacity to support our species permanently at a high standard of living while also overcoming environmental externalities through technology, and (2) those who see overpopulation as a source of environmental externalities that must be overcome through technology. Rapid population growth has been found to have a quantitatively significant negative effect on the rate of economic growth in developing countries, whereas rapid fertility decline can reduce the incidence and severity of poverty, according to recent studies. Even in developed countries, increased population growth will necessitate increased spending on basic infrastructure, resulting in unproductive capital widening at the cost of capital deepening, according to some who argue that past positive relationships between population and economic growth should not be used to justify population growth today. Lower savings rates as a result of rapid population growth in the 1980s, a return to existing agricultural technologies, and environmental degradation may have decreased the quality of some agricultural land are just a few of the causes.

3. Climate Change

According to an analysis of the relationship between population growth and global warming, the *"carbon legacy" of just one child can produce 20 times more greenhouse gas than a person will save by driving a high-mileage car, recycling, using energy-efficient appliances and light bulbs, etc. Each child born in the United States will add about 9,441 metric tons of carbon dioxide to the carbon legacy of an average parent. The study concludes, "Clearly, the potential savings from reduced reproduction are huge compared to the savings that can be achieved by changes in lifestyle."*

The authors of one of these analyses, Paul Murtaugh, warned that: *"In discussions about climate change, we tend to focus on the carbon emissions of an individual over his or her lifetime. Those are important issues and it's essential that they should be considered. But an added challenge facing us is continuing population growth and increasing global consumption of resources. Future growth amplifies the consequences of people's reproductive choices today, the same way that compound interest amplifies a bank balance."*



Consumption trends have a strong influence on the scale of the carbon legacy. A child born in the United States will be responsible for nearly seven times the carbon emissions of a child born in China and 168 times the effect of a child born in Bangladesh under current conditions.²⁰

Furthermore, the globalization of the world economy has the potential to obscure individual countries' real carbon footprints. China, for example, recently overtook the United States as the world's top emitter of greenhouse gases. However, a significant portion of such gases are released during the manufacturing of consumer products in the United States and Europe.

V. SOLUTIONS

1. Opportunities for women and girls

Currently, there are more than 130 million young women and girls worldwide who do not have access to basic education. Sexual practices and children's marriages interfere with their access to education even more. An illiterate girl is more likely to have children at an early age, which puts her at risk of abuse. In addition, poor families are less likely to send their daughters to kindergarten.

According to a study by Harvard Health Review, there is a direct and important link between improved education for women and girls and lower fertility rates. A 1998 Niger case study by Harvard found a 31% reduction in the fertility rate of postgraduate women.

Numerous studies have shown that educating women reduces fertility in a given country.

²⁰Human Population Growth And Climate Change, Centre for Biological diversity, https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/population_and_sustainability/climate/.

Highly educated women are more likely to use effective birth control methods.²¹

A number of studies have shown that educating women decreases fertility rate in a given country. Women who are more educated are more likely to use effective methods of birth control.²²

2. Promoting Family Planning

Since the world's population is rapidly increasing, raising public consciousness about family planning and informing people about the severe consequences of overpopulation will help to slow population growth.

Family planning allows people to have the number of children they want, which benefits mothers' wellbeing and contributes to the nation's social and economic growth. In most developing countries, including Ethiopia, it is normal for women to have an excessive number of children who are too similar in age. As a result, the country's population has increased sharply, but economic growth has not kept pace with it. A society that is too unbalanced would eventually have a negative effect on the country's well-being. One of the tactics that is proving to be successful in addressing these issues is family planning.

3. Incentives

Incentives have proven to be an effective policy tool for addressing a wide range of development problems, including population. A highly successful population measure is to have a nutritional, educational, or even financial opportunity. There are certain incentive programs in place, such as paying a certain amount of money to families with no more than two children or providing free or subsidized education to single children, etc. which are in place in the majority of developing countries facing population-related challenges and have proven to be successful.

Small, one time payments can be given to individuals who become sterilized. There are at least 20 countries that pay incentives for sterilization, including most of the South-Asian countries. India offered sterilization incentives in the late 50's though the amount paid was very meagre—just \$6. If these incentives are increased then there may be more people who may go for sterilization.²³

²¹ Beth Kinsella, *Secondary Education for Females: A Primary Way to Prevent Overpopulation*, HARVARD COLLEGE GLOBAL HEALTH REVIEW (last visited May 22, 2021), <https://www.hcs.harvard.edu/hgr/online/secondary-education-women/>.

²² STEFOFF, *supra* note 6 at 82.

²³ Judith Jacobsen, *Promoting Population Stabilization. Incentives for Small Families* (Washington, D.C.: Worldwatch Institute, 1983), Worldwatch Paper No. 54.

Rewarding people who adhere to family planning norms is not the only way to decrease overpopulation. Governments can also use disincentives on large families or can withhold benefits like subsidies, employment benefits, job selection, preference in school admission. States can introduce tax deductions based on the number of children one has. Many states in India have implemented a two child policy. In Rajasthan, candidates having more than two children cannot be appointed for government jobs. Similar disincentives are there in Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra where a person having more than two children is barred from contesting local elections.

4. Promoting the use of Contraception

More than 200 million women worldwide do not use modern contraceptives to prevent pregnancy. Inadequate access, concerns about health consequences, and societal expectations (often from male partners) to not use it are all factors. These women are mainly from the poorest countries in the world, where the population is expected to increase by 3 billion. Overseas help funding for family planning is critical, both in terms of ensuring adequate levels and efficient service delivery, and it goes hand-in-hand with promoting gender equity and involving males. Because of stereotypes, policies, and stresses within their countries or cultures, some women prefer not to use contraception around the world. Very big family sizes are desirable in some countries, while abortion is avoided or prohibited in others. Effective family planning programs also included work with women and men to shift views towards abortion and family size. Religious boundaries can be dismantled or ignored. When Iran's religious leader announced that abortion was compatible with Islamic religion, a highly active family planning program was launched. Portugal and Italy, both overwhelmingly Catholic countries in Europe, have some of the lowest birth rates.²⁴

²⁴ *Solutions*, Population Matters, <https://populationmatters.org/solutions>.

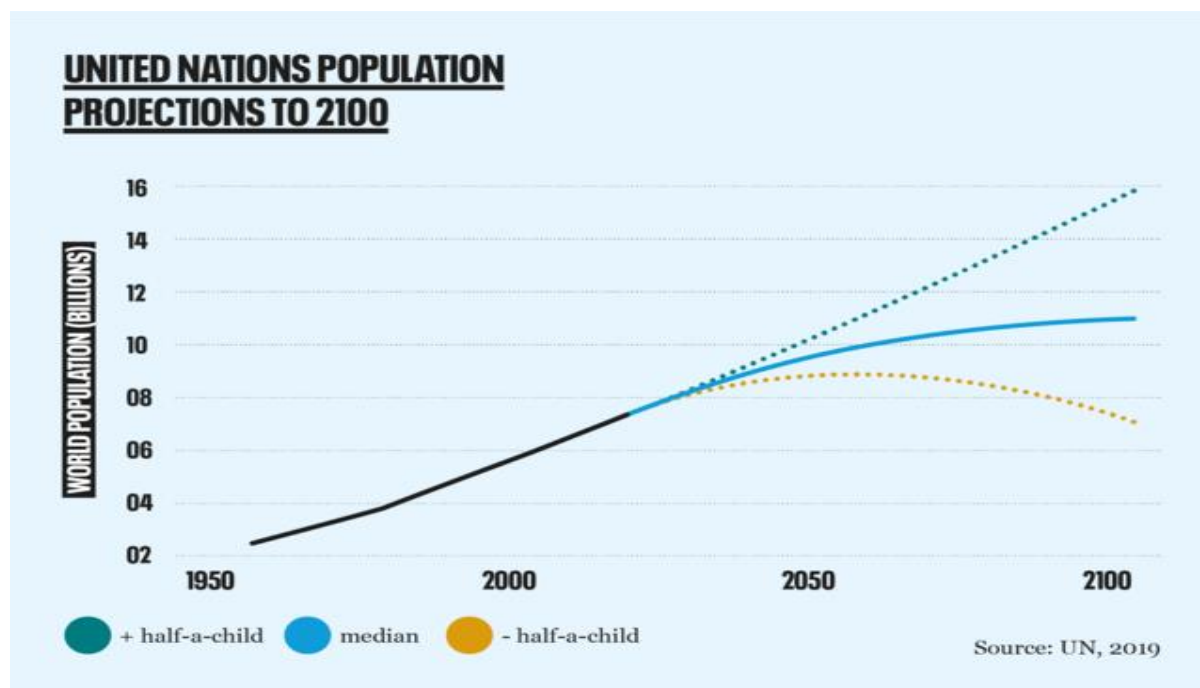


Fig 2. Population growth projection

5. Education Schemes

Education is crucial, not only in terms of mitigating the overpopulation crisis, but also in terms of mitigating the overpopulation issue. As we've noticed, disadvantaged people are more likely to have children than wealthy people. This is because disadvantaged families often do not have pension plans and must depend on their children to provide for them as they get old. As a result, schooling will assist people in escaping poverty and thereby potentially lead to population reduction.

VI. CONCLUSION

Overpopulation is an issue that plagues society and has far reaching socioeconomic impacts. Governments in countries such as India that are underdeveloped need to address issues of education, religious barriers, Incentives and so on to reduce the population growth. A majority of Indians are unemployed and live under the poverty line; a reduction in population will increase the employment and quality of life of the population. The solutions mentioned in this paper should be in effect to combat overpopulation and ensure a sustainable planet and increase quality of life.
