**Overpopulation**

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<http://www.tigweb.org/youth-media/panorama/article.html?ContentID=16319&start> Sept. 30, 2007

*A note to you, students: The world’s population is on the verge of reaching 7 billion. As a result, much discussion and analysis is taking place about how we reached that number, and what it means for us and our planet. Please read the following article that outlines one writer’s OPINION (through an opinion piece) on some of the potential causes of overpopulation. But be warned – it is somewhat graphic in some sections. The article, and several others, can be found on the above link, as part of the TakingITGlobal.org website.*

Imagine, a woman lying in the street bleeding, her screams echoing through the poverty-ridden back allies. Yet, no one takes notice, for she is a woman; a woman who just underwent a botched abortion and who is now praying for death to come quickly. She is just one of the 585,000 women who will die of preventable complications during unsafe abortions or childbirth. Further imagine, a child being born and instead of smiling faces to greet the new life, that child is strangled by a fellow family member and tossed into a ditch, its tiny heart no longer beating in its limp and lifeless body.

This infant could possibly be one of the 10,000 female infanticide victims in China alone. Also picture, an eight year old girl forced to stay home toiling without food or clean water while her brothers come home to a nice meal after a day of school and play - a common sight in India. Now, look at today’s world. You no longer have to imagine these horrible things, for they are normal things happening everyday around the world. Not surprisingly, these situations, these extremes, are a dire consequence of the world’s over- population and resultant poverty in third world countries.

Overpopulation in undeveloped poverty-stricken countries such as Ethiopia, India, and Haiti is not the only factor impacting the world’s resources. Over-consumption, prevalent in developed countries in the western world, is a serious problem also threatening the wellbeing of future generations. It is astounding that over three-quarters of the world’s resources are consumed by one-quarter of the world’s population.

When a child is born in the western world, that child consumes considerably more of the world’s resources than those born in less developed countries. It is this combination of over-consumption and overpopulation that plays a major role in poverty around the world. Societies in third world countries are impoverished due to insufficient resources to maintain their burgeoning population, lack of job and entrepreneurial opportunities, and inadequate education and training. In turn, their governments are impoverished due to low worker productivity (poor health and starvation) and specialized expertise.

The highest urban growth is taking place in some of the poorest countries around the world. Take Ethiopia for example, where bad economic policies have led to a lack of education, food, health care and birth control. An Ethiopian, who has an average annual income of $180, cannot afford $40 for birth control pills. Poverty is not only the result of overpopulation but is also continuing the course of it. In other words, overpopulation creates poverty but poverty, in turn, contributes to overpopulation.

In many impoverished countries where the likelihood of a child living past five is low, the people have more children, since they cannot expect many of them to live. For example, in Nepal one out of five children die due to lack of healthcare and proper nutrition, a direct impact of extreme poverty. This low survival rate brings the birth rate up. Yet, it is not just cultural expectations and the joy of children which contributes to high birth rates. Since there is no pension for the elderly (also a factor of low economy) the children are the only assurance that the aging will survive. Thus, parents look to children for later security - the more children you have, the more likely you will survive in your senior years.

Literacy is another major issue in overpopulation. Education plays a fundamental role in family planning and thus population growth. Yet, nearly a billion people entered the 21st century unable to read and sign their names. The majority of these billion people are women. In many countries, women are seen as second rate citizens and are denied education. A number of knowledgeable people have expressed the view that the most important factor in overpopulation is women's second rate status in many societies. Take, for example, India where girls work all day while boys go to school and play.

It does not matter how wealthy the family is, education for girls in not seen as a priority. Girls, in general, are not seen as a priority. In over 8,000 abortions performed in India, only one was a male. Thus, instead of paying for a daughter’s education families would rather use the money for their daughter’s dowry.

Yet, why is female education so important to population? The answer is ‘family planning’. An educated woman understands reproduction and can make decisions on her own behalf. She becomes knowledgeable about her contraceptive options. She will recognize that for her family to live comfortably, the number of children must not exceed the family’s resources. In Kerlela India, the educated method of birth control is working amazingly. They have found female literacy to be the most enduring contraceptive.

Unlike in Bolivia where large families are due to women's lack of right to choose when she has intercourse, and absence of information on contraceptives. The rhythm method of birth control method does not work even if taught, because you cannot properly teach this method to illiterate women. This lack of education leads to extreme forms of birth control such as unsanitary and self-induced abortions and infanticide. It also contributes to unsafe pregnancies for both the fetus and mother and high infant mortality rates.

Yet, it is not just our neighbors to the east where cultural expectations and norms are contributing to global overpopulation. In South America, it is common for a married man to have many mistresses and to have children with them. In Southern America, it is a sign of manliness and virility to have many children with many different women. These men don’t support the children they father and the women don't have money to raise their children alone. If women were properly educated, they would better understand that they could not afford to feed children on a single parent income. Statements like “I didn't worry about feeding my children, I thought God would take care of it,” would not be said. This latter comment highlights another factor of over population, ‘religion’.

In western society, people have greater options for their religious choices and their education. Religious conformity is not practiced in most developed countries and there is a separation of secular and spiritual matters (i.e. there is no state imposed religion). Children are exposed to various religious beliefs and while they are often instructed in the religious practices of their parents, they are able to make choices as adults regarding their religious affiliation. Many people in this type of society find a balance between modern science and spirituality so they can make informed decisions to guide their life. Yet, when religious freedom is denied and there is no state/church separation, strict religious practices are forced upon society and choices get made for you.

This is a fact of life in many eastern and middle-eastern countries such as Iran, Iraq and India. Religions such as Islam, as practiced by Muslims, are actually encouraging overpopulation. Even the Catholic religion contributes to overpopulation due to the Vatican’s long held beliefs on birth control and abortion. The Catholic Church continues to call people who use contraceptives, sinners. It is difficult to educate people regarding the importance of using contraceptives for both their children's health and world’s wellbeing when they believe their use of contraceptives could land them in hell. Both spiritual education and scientific education should both be available to everyone. However, when people cannot afford proper education as is often the case in impoverished countries, the only source of information is the Church which advocates for having many children.

The Church, however, has no answers on how parents are to feed, clothe, and educate their offspring with no money available. In the Philippines, 80% of people are Roman Catholic. Most Filipinos believe that children are gifts from God and, therefore, large families are common throughout the Philippines. The Vatican has a great influence on both social and political life. Thus, abortion and divorce are against the law in the Philippines and condoms and other methods of birth control are frowned upon. This leads to serious social problems. When a society is not educated about, nor understand, the scientific and economical aspects of their choices, social, economical, and political instability are a result.

There are a number of different attitudes to contraception in the Islamic faith. The Quaran says: “You should not kill your children for fear of want”. Muslim tradition permits the use of birth control where the wellbeing of the family is concerned. Yet, the Quaran also says that a son must light the funeral fire for their parents to get into heaven, so families will usually not stop having children until one or more sons is born. This results in couples exceeding the number of children they wanted, just to have a son. Moreover, the wife has no choice in the matter but must comply with the dictates of her husband. This reflects another instance where women's second rate status has a negative impact on population control.

All in all, there are many factors affecting the overpopulation issue. Yet, the thing that seems to tie them all together is ‘inequality’; Gender inequality, financial inequality, status inequality, and country inequality. We have one Earth and we are one species and all of us need to work together equally to get the most out of it, and ensure a future we can look to with hope. To achieve this, we need to educate and empathize with all people of the world. If we make others hurt, we are hurting ourselves. If we help those who are struggling with poverty, disease and intolerable living conditions, we are helping the Earth survive. Overpopulation is a global issue that must be handled in a spirit of cooperation.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:**

1. **According to this writer, what are three possible causes of overpopulation? (Understanding level)**
2. **In YOUR opinion, which one seems most true? Why? (Analyzing/Evaluating levels)**
3. **Review the first paragraph of this article. How does the author effectively set the TONE for the rest of the article in this first paragraph? (Analyzing level)**
4. **What is your overall opinion on reading an OPINION PIECE of writing? What are the upsides? What are the downsides? How is it different from a news article that you may read? (Analyzing/Evaluating levels)**

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