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Sociology, Population



1 RSM419: Green Paper - Overpopulation Global population has already reached a record high of 7 billion people as of 2011. While it continues to grow at an estimated rate of 1.1% annually, it becomes a worldwide society concern when it comes to the topic of whether the world can continue to sustain such high numbers. Like a ripple effect, this adverse pattern in population has a direct impact on other major environmental issues such as resource depletion, waste excretion and pollution, etc. To highlight why this matter is of importance, this paper will briefly examine the causes and effects of overpopulation, and specifically discuss on possible solutions to this global environmental issue. As a result of rapid advances in the science and medicine area, it is evident that there has been an exponential increase in birth rates and a steady decline in mortality rates over the past decades. Both of which are fundamental causes of the current overpopulation issue. Another major factor is the lack of education amongst people. Specifically, people are not educated on the importance of preventing population from growing excessively, nor are they aware of the downsides to overpopulation. Hence population size is not properly controlled. Although an increase in population is equivalent to an increase in human resources, which is beneficial for the world economy. Population growth directly causes numerous other environmental issues. Firstly, more people require more resource usage. This sets off an imbalance between natural resources usage and replacement, which directly leads to a natural resource depleting trend. Specifically, forests are being cut down at a dramatic speed to serve demands in wood and land. More people means more food consumption, which give raise to high demands in food. Although

there are continual efforts to prevent overfishing, it is evident that the issue is still existent as “ over 70% of the world’s fish species are either fully exploited or 2 depleted”² according to estimates from the Food and Agriculture Organization. Hence if overpopulation continues its current trend, either each individual will consume less than the current average amount of fishes or they will naturally deplete away to extinction under the worst case scenario. There are simply not enough fishes available to serve the growing demand. Likewise, over farming (for food) and fossil fuel shortages (for energy) are impacted in a similar manner. Secondly, to meet demand, there is a continual shrinkage pattern in rural areas while expansions continue in urban locations, which contributes to pollution in the natural air and water systems, leading to severe plant and animal extinction conditions. This is supported by demographic facts for the United States alone over the past 200 years, “ it has lost 50% of its wetlands, 90% of its northwestern old-growth forest, and 99% of its tall grass prairie. ”³ This highlights the speed at which rural land is given up for city developments, should this adverse pattern continue in the rest of the world, rural land activities such as livestock, dairying, poultry farming, etc., will begin to be scarce, which further limits the resources available. Thirdly, industrialized countries have always had problems with greenhouse gas emissions, as they lead to ozone depletion and climate changes. If it is not properly regulated, a rapidly growing population will only exemplify this issue further. Lastly, on an economic context, with the growing numbers, there will be an inadequate amount of jobs available to support the population. Specifically, the number of applicants for a job has increase dramatically over the past decades. This

leads to high unemployment rates, resulting in an adverse effect on the world's economic growth. All of the discussed issues suggest that overpopulation is a global concern and a problem that should be addressed immediately. It is important to highlight that one of the core reasons to why this is a growing issue is that population cannot increase indefinitely. Based on a study titled *3 Food, Land, Population and the U. S. Economy*, it was estimated that to achieve a sustainable economy, world population will need to be reduced by two-thirds. ⁴ Hence allowing gradual changes to start taking place now is definitely necessary in allowing the future to be at more sustainable conditions. Facing the adverse impacts of overpopulation, there are a variety of mitigation measures that should be in place. As mentioned earlier, a major cause of overpopulation is the lack of knowledge people have in the core problem and its potential effects on the global environment. Hence focus should be placed in educating the public, and providing more programs on family planning and birth control to raise awareness, because this has a relatively more forward looking effect through setting social norms. On the regulations side, governments should consider implementing population control policies. For example, China has a "One child policy" in place since 1979, which has been successful in controlling and gradually reducing population. Numerically, approximately 400 million births were prevented since its inception up to 2011. ⁵ Population control policies are long term initiatives that the government should begin implementing on a global context. Similarly, short sighted initiatives could also be in place to assist, governments could provide funding to endorse abortions and birth control metrics. The continual growth rate of the world population is a sign

that we should take matters seriously. It is inevitable to admit that overpopulation is intertwined with numerous severe environmental issues, which leads us to be socially worse off. Ignorance may not have immediate effects, but with the current exponential growth, overpopulation is an accelerating problem that, if not properly addressed, will lead to severe consequences in our global environment in the future. Hence acting early and letting population reach equilibrium with the world's available land and resource conditions is most optimal for our human race. 4 Citations: 1: " Causes of Overpopulation." Web. . 2: " Overfishing: A Threat to Marine Biodiversity." UN News Center. UN. Web. 01 Mar. 2012. . 3: " One-child Policy." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 28 Feb. 2012. Web. 01 Mar. 2012. . 4: " World Overpopulation Awareness." WOA!! World Ovepopulation Awareness. Web. 01 Mar. 2012. . 5: " Overpopulation." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 29 Feb. 2012. Web. 01 Mar. 2012. . Other Bibliography: " Effects of Overpopulation." Overpopulation in Africa. Web. 01 Mar. 2012. . " How Global Population Growth Is Creating Serious EnvironmentalÃ, Problems." About. com Environmental Issues. Web. 01 Mar. 2012. . " My Writing." : Overpopulation Essay. Web. 01 Mar. 2012. . " Overpopulation." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 29 Feb. 2012. Web. 01 Mar. 2012. . " Seven Words That Can Change the World." Human Overpopulation Causes, Effects and Solutions. Web. 01 Mar. 2012. .