

Environmental degradation essay sample



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Environmental degradation is the systematic deterioration of the natural environment through the continuous depletion of the natural resources that comprise it (Hunter, and Population Matters 3). Such resources are air, water, soil and the others which are based on these like forests and minerals. After the advent of the agrarian and industrial revolutions, the exploitation of natural resources increased exponentially until the ability of the natural environment to support the burden weighed down upon it was compromised.

Ever since, there has been an unending debate surrounding the best approach towards environmental conservation amid an ever growing population and a rising demand for consumer goods. Should the human population concentrate more on measures of controlling population growth, or should individual consumption be reduced in order to reduce the load on the environment? Consumerism as a lifestyle is based on the continuous creating of consumer goods and methodologies to increase the demand for these goods (Jorgenson 374).

In other words, it is an economic system based on consumption.

Consumerism contributes to environmental degradation in that it mostly lays emphasis on the production of branded goods and services that are biased towards luxury instead of functionality (Jorgenson 374). Such goods include fuel guzzling cars, power consuming electronics and expensive jewelry.

Consumerist societies therefore consume natural resources, which are part of the natural environment, at a much higher rate than most conventional societies.

However, it is worth noting that the percentage of the population that can actually afford consumer lifestyles is very small, and its contribution to environmental degradation is therefore relatively small (Jorgenson 377). It is therefore of paramount importance to view the exponential growth in the world's population as the main threat to the environment. In other words, the truth of the matter is that individual consumerism contributes insignificantly to environmental degradation.

Even the most outspoken critics of consumerism base their arguments on the moral viewpoint, like its tendency to lead to elitism, dominance and expansionism. This is not to deny that individual consumerism, through its production of luxury goods and the waging of expensive advertising strategies that consume a lot of energy, does not lead to overconsumption and thus overexploitation of resources, the point is that population consumerism exerts most pressure on the environment and therefore should be the main focus when devising efforts to fight environmental degradation.

Most of the factors that lead to environmental degradation are related to man's activities on earth (Blitt, and Homer-Dixon 41). Of course there are some other factors that contribute to deterioration of environmental resources, but if the destruction is to be stopped or at least slowed down, the efforts should be around those aspects of human lifestyles that can be changed or controlled since it is the only chance. Upon careful scrutiny, human factors significantly impacting on the environment in a negative way are closely tied with the total number of people living at any given time.

Below is an analysis of why population deduction should be the main area while devising measures to limit environmental degradation. With rapidly growing population numbers, there arises a need to increase the production of food so that people do not starve. Food can only be grown by growing crops, herding more livestock, hunting more land and aquatic animals or gathering more fruits from trees and other forms of vegetation (Hunter, and Population Matters 13).

The culmination of all the above processes is agricultural burning and the destruction of forest resources to create more land for farming, destruction of wildlife and grasslands, due to overgrazing, overfishing and overexploitation of farmlands. In addition, more natural resources are used up in fueling agricultural and agricultural machinery and industrial installations meant for the processing of food substances. The end result is that land, forest and marine resources are extensively exploited up to levels they cannot recover through natural mechanisms; leading to increase in environmental degradation.

The total population of the world would not be an issue if there was unlimited productive land, unlimited water and inexhaustible energy and other natural resources (Hunter, and Population Matters 15). However, the above resources have been diminishing since time immemorial, and what is left is expected to support a population that is far larger than has been seen in history; and is still growing. In addition to this, the advent of the modern technological and information age has brought about the development of better quality life and the use of machines, accessories and methods that use energy (Blitt, and Homer-Dixon 48) .

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Mortality rates have gone down due to development of more effective medical solutions and vaccines to some of the diseases that used to take a toll on the population just some decades ago. The resultant increased population has applied a very strenuous burden to the environment, and if continued environmental degradation is to be halted or at least limited to sustainable levels, then it is the rise this population that must be addressed. Another dangerous threat facing the environment is pollution.

Here, there is a bone of contention about what causes the most pollution: is it individual consumerism, or is it population consumerism? Upon scrutiny of the statistics, it is worth noting that even though the population of the world has more than doubled in the last forty years, the population of most developed nations has remained more or less constant. These nations are however leading in the production of greenhouse gases from industries and other sources like motor vehicles, airplanes and ships.

But in essence, a majority of industrial products from the most developed nations eventually find their way to the developing world (Hunter, and Population Matters 147). If there was not a market for industrial goods in the developing markets (which are actually driving the current economic expansion in them and in the developed world), industrial, transport and communication production in the developed world would be harmonized to satisfy domestic markets. Population growth again becomes a key aspect which must be controlled if environmental degradation is to be limited.

In conclusion, population explosion has played a major role in fueling environmental degradation. In the developing world especially in Africa and

parts of the Asian Continent, awareness concerning environmental conservation has not penetrated much (Hunter, and Population Matters 63). Couple this with the highest population growth rates and the need to feed all these people and overgrazing, destruction of forests, and water catchment's areas and overexploitation of farmlands leading to soil nutrient depletion and therefore underproduction comes to the fore.

Even though some continents like Africa contribute the least of the total greenhouse gas emissions, they are most affected by environmental degradation by virtue of their location around the tropics and the influence of other agents of degradation besides greenhouse gases (Hunter, and Population Matters 57). Population increase features prominently among these, and therefore should be given the bigger emphasis in combating environmental degradation.