

Analysing the effects of overpopulation in developing countries politics essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Over population has been identified as one of the major reasons for the poverty that thrives in many developing countries including India, Bangladesh, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia amongst others. These countries have high birth rates with inadequate resources to support their growing populace. To some extent they would be a living justification of Thomas Malthus statement that “ the power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man.” In this essay, I seek to give an in depth explanation of Malthus principles on population growth and food production and further draw up the relationship between these principles and some of the developing countries of the 21th century.

The underlying basis for Malthus principle is that “ population, when unchecked, increased in a geometrical ratio, and subsistence for man in an arithmetical ratio ”[i]in lay mans terms this would mean that human beings become double their number in a particular period while food production only increases a unit more in that same period. The law of diminishing returns would support his claim, in that as more of a variable factor, which is labour, is employed on a fixed factor, which is land, total production increases to a point and then starts to decrease.[ii]He insinuates that if this occurs for a long period of time, there will be many people chasing fewer goods and this will cause prices of goods to increase unduly. Further, the supply of labour will exceed its demand as more people are fighting for few jobs on the market, as such wage rates decrease to a large extent. In these cases the lower classes always suffer most.

According to Malthus, even if we assume that diminishing returns never sets in and the land produces the same amount of output year after year, man

<https://assignbuster.com/analysing-the-effects-of-overpopulation-in-developing-countries-politics-essay/>

would still have to face this dreadful phenomena. He believes that though humans hold the power to reason, it is still inherent in their nature to reproduce constantly. However, according to him “ misery is the check that represses the superior power of population and keeps its effects equal to the means of subsistence.”[iii]The Malthusian theory holds that there are natural checks on overpopulation. Some are natural causes like miscarriages, earthquakes and famine while others include “ vice” and are due to man’s struggle for survival. The latter is quite similar to Charles Darwin’s theory on the “ survival of the fittest.[iv]” In a bid to stay alive human beings resort to wars of conquest and expansion, killing many others in the process .

Malthus’ conclusive belief was that if population growth was not checked there would soon be a sort of world famine, where a huge percentage of the world’s population would have no food to eat. Thus man should minimize reproduction through means such as abstaining from sex. Today, Malthus has been criticized by many for putting forth a theory which has been proven wrong. This is because although the population of the world was about 6, 790, 062, 216 in the year 2009[v], a fair number of countries are still able to cater for themselves. Countries like the United States are facing the health hazard of obesity resulting from having too much food to eat.[vi]However, for others, this is not so.

Malthus’ predictions of a population boom in relation to food availability is especially proven in the case third world countries, most of which appear to be producing food at a subsistence level. They have not adopted mechanized methods of farming and produce on a very small scale. The farmers who represent a large portion of the the populace in these countries are very

poor and consequently produce low yields.[vii] This would explain why they cannot produce food for themselves, and have to import large amounts of foreign goods into their lands. The reasons for the adaptation of these systems of agriculture vary in different countries. Under President Mugabe's government, Zimbabwe has a poor land tenure system where the government, instead of farmers owns the land on which they farm on. This makes it difficult for farmers to expand their farm lands and. Poverty also rules supreme among the indigenous population, poor farmers therefore have to turn to subsistence farming,[viii] i. e. farming to feed themselves their families and probably leave a few crops to barter with other farmers and a little to sow during the following planting season. Due the fact that, production is not stable coupled with the land tenure system i. e. (lands in Zimbabwe are owned solely by the government); banks in Zimbabwe are reluctant to give out loans out to farmers[ix].

The problem with Africa's subsistence farming culture has to do with irrigation and funding[x]. The issue of irrigation has to do with the climate of Africa. Africa has two main seasons. The rainy season and the dry season. These two seasons are annual. Therefore farmers predicting the weather cultivate their lands in the late dry season and wait for the rainy season to irrigate their crops. Now, most at times the rains starts unevenly i. e. it doesn't always start on time. Some farmers therefore lose their full crop yield. Others lose their harvests completely. Generally, there is no artificial irrigation in most developing communities. Countries like Ethiopia, which have huge geographic desert patches have an even worse problem of having

little arable land[xi]. This situation is a climatic situation, a natural phenomenon.

Fertility rates definitely continue to rise, causing an increasing growth to the population; most developing countries produce more mouths than they can feed. The Alan Guttmacher Institute in the United States conducted a research which proved that countries which provided free or cheap “contraceptive services” at cheap rates or without charge, tended to have lower birth rates. They also realized that instances of teenage pregnancy were less among countries who engaged in early sex education of their children[xii]. The population of Ethiopia for instance, increased from 12 million in 1900 to 73 million in 2005.[xiii] Obviously, a lot of people in developing countries remain ignorant of the negative implications of overpopulation to a nation and the few that know disregard this notion. Some believe children are a blessing from God, and will reject any ideology that prevents them from procreating. In some African countries for instance, a man’s status is heightened by the number of children, especially males, he can produce. . Though these measures are not as extreme as abstaining from sex and other measures Malthus puts forward for reducing population growth, Governments some developing countries, like Ghana, have tried to introduce policies to check this such as Family planning and sex education[xiv]. One of the checks on population according to the Malthusian principles is miscarriages. However due to improved healthcare systems this is greatly curbed in a lot of developing nations and does not restrict population expansion.

Developing countries have had a high price to pay for the amalgamation of increase population growth and low agricultural production. Just as Malthus predicted, there is a synonymous increase in the unemployed population, eventually creating rising inflation. The compiled inflation rate, for instance in Zimbabwe, between 1997 and 2007 was 38%^[xv]. This further creates a high standard of living, because there are many people fighting to survive on fewer goods. Subsequently, the employment rates start to decrease alarmingly. This is due to the fact that there are more people offering their services for fewer jobs. Not everyone can be employed. Also wage rates are reduced and for the same number of working hours, employees are paid a lot less. Hence the need for governments to introduce a minimum wage i. e. the lowest possible wage an employee can be paid^[xvi]. However, in some cases, because the people are desperate for jobs, they are willing to be cheated by employers, just to hold on to a lifeline of survival. Obviously, should the population in Zimbabwe continue to increase to relatively high figures, coupled with the present unemployment figures, of food shortages will occur. The trend that Zimbabwe faces is similar to what many developing countries face. Malthus' theory is therefore a definite blue print for a third world economy

The Director- General of FAO predicted in 1987, that the year 2010 would see an improvement in agriculture; he however stated that it would have little effect on places like sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. He thus urged the world to “brace” itself to come to the aid of these countries when necessary.^[xvii] It may be argued that countries like China have an even greater population and yet do not face food shortages, but the difference is

clear. The Chinese are a highly industrious people. Their governments' interests are channeled toward industrialization and infrastructure development. Most of their farmers are paddy rice farmers[xviii], who have the advantage of farming in two advantages areas, the " water - logged lowland paddies and the hillside highland ridges"[xix]. The Chinese also have the advantage of being in a temperate climatic zone, enjoying four seasons winter which is useless to farmers, spring, summer and autumn which are farming - friendly[xx].

Artificial irrigation measures are also available in certain areas, i. e. both mechanical and locally improvised. The mechanized farming used by Chinese farmers irrefutably makes them more productive. The Chinese government in their own way has discovered the practicality of Malthus' theory i. e. the possibility of overpopulation causing food shortages. In their bid to curb this problem, they have issued legislative laws that, limit child birth to one child per family[xxi].

Elaborating on this conclusion, it can be realized that Malthus' theory works very well in third world where lack of mechanization and funding creates deficiencies in farming. Countries like China, however, due to mechanization, climatic conditions and artificial irrigation structures enable their farmers to meet the country's food production needs. Developing countries should follow this example to emerge from the poverty that is gradually sucking them in. Improved farming techniques as well as reduced birth rates are the way forward for the developing world.