

World resources – scarcity and conflict



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In the 1960s, one photograph changed the way world leaders, scientists and the general population thought about the management of the world's resources. People became concerned about the world's resources running out. This photograph was our Earth. When world leaders saw this photograph taken from space, the world looked for the first time the world looked small and finite, this is because there is so many people on this planet and there needs to be consideration on what resources we use, and how much we use of them. The term 'spaceship earth' is applied here to describe how people felt about the Earth's resources... they were limited just as a spaceship has limited reserves of air, water and food. Before world leaders were in illusion thinking that the world's resources were in abundance.

Some resources are non renewable meaning that after they run out there is no way of replacing them, and they only reform after millions of years these resources are called fossil fuels. There are three types of fossil fuels (crude oil, coal and natural gas). These resources are the resources the world should be concerned about and therefore use it sparingly. However the fossil fuels although the most important are not the only non renewable resources, others include food and forests. There are other resources called renewable energy sources which are starting to be developed such as biomass and wind power which takes the earth's natural processes such as wind and through certain mechanisms convert it into energy which can be used for electricity.

So in answer to the question, the fossil fuels are the most important world resources, however there are other non renewable world resources that have to be carefully used otherwise certain things couldn't happen, for example imagine what the world would be like without out any wood.

When the first maps of the world were created, many parts of the world were not discovered and therefore because society in that day and age believed in sea creatures and mermaids and other such things, everyone thought two things, firstly that at the end of the world was limitless and secondly that at the end of the worlds there were sea monsters. The first maps of the world were flat. Naturally many incorrect assumptions had been made, the world was not limitless and of course no sea monsters. However as countries began to be discovered the world seemed to become limitless and powerful. People began to have a care free attitude about the resources because they thought they would never run out.

Things started to go downhill when it was discovered that the world was actually round, people started to believe that the world was not limitless, however they still remained in the delusion that the world's resources were not going to run out any time soon and then therefore continued with their care free attitude. It was not until the 1960's that people began to get worried about the world's resources and decide to do something not to waste electricity (which in theory is the product of fossil fuels). This diagram shows how many people began to care about the world.

Background

There are two main official views in regard to the world's resources running out. These are optimists and pessimists:

Optimists View

Optimists believe that the world's resources are eventually going to run out, but we can delay that happening, and our future is not doomed. Because there is such talk and media coverage of the world's resources running out, optimists hope that people will alter their lifestyle and take certain measures to delay the world's resources running out such as turning their computers off at night. Optimists also believe because of advanced technology and science, we can discover more and more alternative fuels, optimists believe that people would use alternative energy sources as it is cheap and therefore more economical. In the future optimists believe that there should be a more equal distribution of the world's resources. Famous optimists include E. Boserup and J. Simon.

Pessimists View

These people believe that the world's resources have a finite limit and could eventually run out or be damaged beyond repair. In 1970, 10 countries, known as the Club of Rome, met in order to discuss resource management. Their report, entitled 'The Limits to Growth', made predictions about a world where continued industrial and population growth would consume both resources and food supplies. This Club believed that population increase are the reason why world resources are running out because there is more demand for it; they put forward the idea of preventive checks. An example of one of their ideas is the one child policy; they wanted to make the one child and international policy. Famous pessimists include P. Ehrlich.

Factors that are causing the World's Resources to Decrease

There are a few main factors that are causing the world's resources to decrease.

Population

Because there is such a growth of population, people are needing more and more energy in their house. This is best displayed in a case study:

In the year 2000 Family A (comprising of a husband and wife) used 20,000kg of energy per year. In 2002 they had their first child. Before Family A didn't watch that much T. V., however now because their child needs entertainment, the T. V. is turned on for the whole day even if the child is not watching. So in 2003 their yearly consumption increased to 25,000kg.

Now think of this on an international scale and everyday the population is using up more and more world resources. Optimists say that creating new alternative energy sources rather than using the fossil fuels up, is the way forward. Pessimists say that the way forward is to enforce an international one child policy, to over populated areas to balance the population out to one of an optimum population. However I agree with the pessimists but I don't think there should be an international one child policy, but as a whole unit we need to find a method to achieve optimum population and taking into consideration a specific area's carrying capacity and therefore move into the direction of sustainable development.

Economic Threats

Because of the current economic downturn people are turning to cheaper ways to provide heat, water and electricity to their houses they are put off by

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the idea of alternative energy sources such as solar panels because they can't afford it

Case Study-Diamonds (Sierra Leone)

In this day and age diamonds are such a controversial issue, as most people in the West think diamonds are nice stones that are on their rings, however twenty years ago 40% of all diamonds were somehow in the process of buying/selling at least one illegal transaction was carried out, now due to the Kimberly agreement and other factors including media this figure has decreased to 25%. Diamonds are a world resource that is limited as they will eventually run out.

Sierra Leone is a country located in the north west of Africa. Sierra Leone is one of the largest diamond producer in the world this is because of it's geographical location, it's relief and finally because it has so many mines. This is still unfortunately has not lead to the economicdevelopment of the country, because rebel troops take over the mines and take all profits. Sometimes diamonds are fought over; these diamonds are known as conflict/blood diamonds.

Sierra Leone's Conflict Diamonds

In 1991, Sierra Leone a rebel force known as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) launched assaults against the government. A military government was set up, yet this did not deter the RUF attacks. From the beginning, the RUF became allies with Liberia. Their goal was officially to combat crime and corruption but it soon became clear that their main aim was to take control

of the diamond mines. The RUF would take prisoners and enslave them to work in the diamond mines. The work conditions were horrible and they were punished for the slightest things. Anyone opposed to the RUF's methods and practices would be brutally punished. All this was unknown to - or perhaps ignored by - the outside world for many years. UN studies estimate that about \$125 million worth of rough diamonds were bought by the diamond industry in Europe alone! The equivalent of this money is tens of thousands of people killed and even more hurt. It was only in 1999 that the UN deployed a mission to Sierra Leone to deal with the problem of Sierra Leone Conflict Diamonds. Since then, sanctions have been put in place so as to curb such illegal activities. The Kimberly Process Certification Scheme requires a paper trail that certifies the origin of rough diamonds. This aims to cut off the flow of diamonds from countries like Sierra Leone.

The question that remains to be answered today is whether the paper trail that accompanies each diamond shipment is for real. Certificates can be forged. Rough diamonds can be smuggled into a "clean" country. After that, there would be no way of knowing where the gems came from. There is always a willing market somewhere in another country. Traders and buyers don't always ask questions. They are just happy to buy and line their pockets. In an area inflicted with suffering and poverty, there is always an official who would be willing to accept bribes. All it takes is one person to overlook a shipment of blood diamonds. For all we know, there might still be a steady flow of rough conflict diamonds coming from the mines of Sierra Leone today. We do not know any of these facts and figures exactly as the

Government is reluctant to let media or aid into the country. In 2000 the BBC published a moving article and photo about diamonds in Sierra Leone.

Effects of the BBC Article and Photo

The BBC article had a resounding effect on the rest of the world not only did people become more interested in where their diamonds came from, but starting to buy ethical diamonds. Also Kanye West (singer) released a controversial song about diamonds in Sierra Leone which caused more and more people to take an interest of the origins of the diamonds. Also Kanye West refused to wear any type of 'bling' which influenced many children.

Artificial/Man made Diamonds

'Science have finally found a way to make diamonds-Bad News for Sierra Leone' this was a news headline a few years ago from the BBC. Everyone knew the time would come when science would be able to find a way to make diamonds. There is a plus side and down side for this, firstly the up side. If more people buy synthetic diamonds because they are cheaper, then more people would stop buying diamonds that have been sold but rebel forces. However on the down side the economy of Sierra Leone is plummeting to all time low because more and more people are buying synthetic diamonds because of the recession.

The Kimberly Process

The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (Kimberley Process) is an international governmental certification scheme that was set up to prevent the trade in diamonds that fund conflict. Launched in January 2003, the <https://assignbuster.com/world-resources-scarcity-and-conflict/>

scheme requires governments to certify that shipments of rough diamonds are free from blood diamonds.

Case Study-Water (Across the Globe)

Water is a world resource as we rely on it thoroughly and if we didn't have the sad reality is we would die. Water is not at the moment is shortage, but the way consumption is going in the West in the next one hundred years it could well become shortage. We have a good supply of water in the West, however in LEDCs, water is quite hard to lay hands on. Water is one of the prime essentials for life as we know it. The plain fact is - no water, no life! This becomes all the more worrying when we realise that the worlds supply of drinkable water will soon diminish quite rapidly. In fact a recent report commissioned by the United Nations has emphasised that by the year 2025 at least 66% of the worlds population will be without an adequate water supply.

Incalculable damage.

As a disaster in the making water shortage ranks in the top category.

Without water we are finished, and it is thus imperative that we protect the mechanism through which we derive our supply of this life giving fluid. Unfortunately the exact opposite is the case. We are doing incalculable damage to the planets capacity to generate water and this will have far ranging consequences for the not too distant future.

Bleak future

The United Nations has warned that burning of fossil fuels is the prime cause of water shortage. While there may be other reasons such as increased solar activity it is clear that this is a situation over which we can exert a great deal of control. If not then the future will be very bleak indeed! Already the warning signs are there.

Droughts

The last year has seen devastating heatwaves in many parts of the world including the USA where the state of Texas experienced its worst drought on record. Elsewhere in the United States forest fires raged out of control, while other regions of the globe experienced drought conditions that were even more severe. Parts of Iran, Afghanistan, China and other neighbouring countries experienced their worst droughts on record. These conditions also extended throughout many parts of Africa and it is clear that if circumstances remain unchanged we are facing a disaster of epic proportions. Moreover it will be one for which there is no easy answer.

Dangers.

The spectre of a world water shortage evokes a truly frightening scenario. In fact the United Nations warns that disputes over water will become the prime source of conflict in the not too distant future. Where these shortages become ever more acute it could foreseeably lead to the brink of nuclear conflict. On a lesser scale water, and the price of it, will acquire an importance somewhat like the current value placed on oil. The difference of course is that while oil is not vital for life, water most certainly is!

Power shift.

It seems clear then that in future years countries rich in water will enjoy an importance that perhaps they do not have today. In these circumstances power shifts are inevitable, and this will undoubtedly create its own strife and tension. Nightmare situation.

In the long term the implications do not look encouraging. It is a two edged sword. First the shortage of water, and then the increased stresses this will impose upon an already stressed world of politics. It means that answers need to be found immediately. Answers that will both improve the damage to the environment, and also find new sources of water for future consumption. If not, and the problem is left unresolved there will eventually come the day when we shall find ourselves with a nightmare situation for which there will be no obvious answer.

Conclusion

Overall I feel that we should be optimistic about the resource management in the future however we should guard about being complacent and consequently wasteful. Science is developing quickly and in the future there will be a system of some sort to enable better management of the resources. However again this doesn't mean we can be wasteful, also we have to make sure that we use certain resources more conservatively to ensure future generations live happily.

On the other hand however if we implant many more alternative energy resources (i. e. wind power instead of coal) then future generations will use

them as the norm, rather than the present day generation who have to deal with this cross over stage that we are undergoing now-the Government encouraging other sources of energy, however when we look at these the prices are sky high. To ensure that we manage resources so that it is more sustainable, I propose certain plans:

- 1) Increase price of electricity and gas, decrease price of alternative energy sources (for example solar panels). This would hopefully on the economic side of things encourage people to use alternative fuel.
- 2) Carry out a major distribution project of the world resources, ensuring each country has roughly the same amount.
- 3) Set up a kind of police to make sure diamonds are not being sold or mined illegally, through slavery or through violence. This will ensure the decrease the amount of conflict or blood diamonds.

Finally, I have outlined five strategies for using more sustainability in my daily life:

- 1) Have a shower, rather than a bath. This will decrease the amount of water I use, reduce the water bills and make it more efficient cleaning process.
- 2) When shopping with my parents, I should encourage them to look at the label and check where the product comes from, and therefore try to get the product, which has the least food miles.
- 3) Encourage my parents to buy energy saving bulbs, which last longer, and are more sustainable.

4) When going out turn off my computer rather than leaving it on standby.

5) When making a cup of tea, don't fill the kettle right to the top, as that wastes, water and energy.