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# Effects of Over-Consumption and Increasing Populations

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by Anup Shah | This Page Last Updated Wednesday, September 26, 2001

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The State of the World, 1999 Report<sup>1</sup> from the Worldwatch Institute suggests that the **global economy could be seriously affected<sup>2</sup> by environmental problems**, such as the lack of access to enough resources to meet growing population demands.

**Environmental degradation can contribute to social and political instability**, which can lead to security issues. This has not currently been addressed<sup>3</sup> by the foreign policy of many nations.

(As a side note, it is interesting to note that there are books and insights popping up that predict future wars will be a new kind of war; resource wars. Yet, this is what it has typically been throughout history, but fortified with ideologies and religions. Ideologies and religions offer different ways to live, and hence different ways to use resources. See the trade and economics<sup>4</sup> section for more on this aspect.)

As the effects of globalization are creating further disparities and inequalities, around the world we are seeing an increase in violence and human rights abuses as disputes about territories, food and water are spilling into wars and internal conflicts. People are fighting<sup>5</sup> for basic needs.

The following are some of the areas of current and future tension. (Note how in the case of many of the regions mentioned below, wealthier nations have often been involved to extract and consume the resources leaving even less in the region for growing populations to contend with.)

- the various conflicts in Africa<sup>6</sup>. It is also feared that conflicts involving water will increase<sup>7</sup>.
- the Middle East<sup>8</sup> where national interests in the vast oil fields have led to wars and influence from states like USA and UK.
- the 1998 riots in Indonesia fueled by the current global financial crisis.
- the Nile<sup>9</sup> area, where Egypt rely on downstream water largely controlled by Ethiopia.
- Iraq, Syria and Turkey where there is tension surrounding the water flow of the Euphrates and Tigris<sup>10</sup>.
- Israel and Jordan, where Israel cut water supplies<sup>11</sup> to Jordan due to sever drought
- Israel and Palestine also are fighting over water<sup>12</sup> resources as well.

- The Chiapas<sup>13</sup> region in Mexico
- Water scarcity in the Gaza<sup>14</sup> region has contributed to the tensions in the Middle East.
- Environmental scarcity and social tensions in Pakistan<sup>15</sup> have led to a worsening situation.
- Tensions in the Narmada<sup>16</sup> region in India between indigenous people and the government.
- Environmental scarcity in Rwanda<sup>17</sup> contributed to the ethnic conflicts in 1994.
- Degradation on the environment and an increase in population is fueling tension in South Africa<sup>18</sup>.
- In Ecuador, it is predicted that extreme violence<sup>19</sup> is going to be seen at indigenous protests against giant oil corporations.

World Watch Institute also point out that water<sup>20</sup> will once again be at the center of new conflicts. They point out that things like IMF and World Bank-backed privatization policies, flawed big dam projects etc have caused further tensions, protest and violence.

Many from those conflicts above, and other conflicts not listed, also see the underlying cause of overly corporate-led globalization as a root cause as well, as they and the foreign policies of the wealthier nations have allowed economic and resource-controlling policies to be instituted in their favor.

Also, while famine is often said to result from effects that are said to be caused by over-population, it is often overlooked on how the impact of politics and economics have a far more significant impact on famines than do "over" population and that those impacted would have a distinct class distinction.

Modern famine responds far more to market forces than to absolute physical scarcities and rarely strikes the well-off. During the great Irish potato famine of 1846-57 which killed close to 1 million people, large landowners routinely exported food to Britain as poor peasants dropped all around them. ... Even in 'classic' twentieth-century Third World famines like that of Bengal in 1943 which killed several millions, wealthy tables remained laden. During the African famines of the 1980s one never heard of massive deaths among bureaucrats, businessmen and army officers ... In the North or the South today it would take a rare combination of circumstances - utterly failed harvests plus a shutdown of trade due to war or similar calamity - to reduce the rich to malnourishment, much less starvation.

— Susan George, *The Lugano Report*, (Pluto Press, 1999), pp.105-106

It is often claimed that population increases lead to poverty and this is why the poor suffer, but as shown throughout this site, causes of poverty are not in population increases, but due to economic and geopolitical reasons.

For additional examples of how resource usage is so skewed and how this can lead to conflicts and wars see the consumption<sup>21</sup> section on this web site.

## Where next?

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1. [Populations: A Numbers Game](#)

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4. [Other Issues Affect and Get Affected by Population](#)
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6. [Gender and Population Issues](#)
7. [Population Links for More Information](#)
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9. [Loss of Biodiversity and Extinctions](#)
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## Online Sources:

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(Note that listed here are only those hyperlinks to other articles from other web sites or elsewhere on this web site. Other sources such as journal, books and magazines, are mentioned above in the original text. Please also note that links to external sites are beyond my control. They might become unavailable temporarily or permanently since you read this, depending on the policies of those sites, which I cannot unfortunately do anything about.)

1. <http://www.worldwatch.org/pubs/sow/1999/>
2. <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/jan1999/1999-01-19-05.asp>
3. <http://www.foreignpolicy-infocus.org/briefs/vol4/v4n02env.html>
4. <http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/>
5. <http://www.cdi.org/adm/transcripts/1143/index.html>
6. <http://www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/Africa.asp>
7. <http://www.adlinkint-newslinkafri.com/news5.htm>
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9. [http://www.oneworld.org/patp/vol5\\_3/eden.html](http://www.oneworld.org/patp/vol5_3/eden.html)
10. [http://www.oneworld.org/patp/vol5\\_3/eden.html](http://www.oneworld.org/patp/vol5_3/eden.html)
11. <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/mar1999/1999-03-18-04.asp>
12. <http://www.tve.org/earthreport/transcript/22Jan2001.html>
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16. <http://www.narmada.org>
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18. <http://utl1.library.utoronto.ca/www/pcs/eps/south/sa1.htm>
19. [http://www.oneworld.org/ips2/july99/04\\_04\\_005.html](http://www.oneworld.org/ips2/july99/04_04_005.html)
20. [http://www.worldwatch.org/forum/water\\_fparticle.html](http://www.worldwatch.org/forum/water_fparticle.html)
21. <http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/Consumption.asp>

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“Give a man a fish; you have fed him for today. Teach a man to fish; and you have fed him for a lifetime.” — *Old Chinese Saying*

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