

We Are Now Eight Billion!

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The animal population in the world is declining at an alarming rate. Many species have already become extinct and many others are on the verge of extinction - we call them endangered species. Patrick Greenfield and Max Benato wrote on October 13, 2022, in the Guardian that the earth's wildlife population has dropped by 68% in less than 50 years. And this has happened because of human actions like deforestation, industrial pollution, and consumption beyond the limits of the planet. The human population is however growing steadily.

According to the United Nations projection, the world population reached eight billion on November 15, 2022. The UN tweeted, "8 billion hopes, 8 billion dreams, 8 billion solutions. Our planet is now home to 8 billion people." The tweet has a kind of celebratory tone. The UN ascribes the growth to increased life expectancy, and improvements in public health, nutrition, medicine, etc. But these attributes do not seem to hold everywhere. Let's take a look at the comparison of the geographical distribution of the world population in 2010 with the current scenario as estimated by

the Worldometer on November 18, 2022: The percentage increases worked out in the last column of the above table show that the top contributor to the growth of the world population to 8 billion is Africa. Most African countries are poor with comparatively lower life expectancy

population reached 1 billion in 1800 and then rose to 2 billion in 1929 that is, after 125 years. But it took only 12 years to grow from 7 billion to 8 billion. The UN estimates that by 2057 the world population will grow by another billion. UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Liu Zheming observes, "Rapid population growth makes eradicating poverty, combating hunger and malnutrition, and increasing

ing to an article titled 'Is the Sahara Desert Growing?' by Owen Mulhern on earth.org. The desert now covers 10% more land compared to 1920 when records began.

Christina Nunez in her article, 'Desertification, explained' published by National Geographic illustrates how global warming and population growth combined increase vulnerability to desertification. According to the article, the European Commission's Joint Research Center has found that every year about 4.18 million square kilometers of land is degraded mostly in Africa and Asia.

More people means more demand for food, job, housing, and so on. Rich countries with low or negative population growth will face lower demands for these things although they have more resources to meet them. Thus, they will continue to enjoy a life of lavish consumption. Also, because of their higher education rate, higher level of awareness, and superior infrastructure, they will better adapt to climate change.

On the other hand, poor countries do not have enough resources to meet the above-mentioned demands associated with higher population growth. So, they will face more poverty and social unrest. Also, with inadequate infrastructure, low education rates, and a lack of awareness, poor countries will become more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Thus, the chasm between the rich and poor will further expand. As the UN Secretary-General warned, "Unless we bridge the yawning chasm between the global haves and have-nots, we are setting ourselves up for an 8-billion-strong world filled with tensions and mistrust, crisis and conflict". Indeed, we are seeing all these already happening. News of armed conflicts, terrorist attacks, famine, droughts, etc. is coming out every day from poor nations around the world.

With the advancement of medical science and the discovery of various life-saving drugs, vaccines, and cures we have reduced the death rate of our species. According to world bank data, the world death rate has come down from 17.71 in 1900 to 7.71 in 2020. By controlling the death rate, we have disturbed the natural balance. To restore and maintain that balance, we also need to control the birth rate in an equitable manner.

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the coverage of health and education systems more difficult".

Let's look further into the future. According to the UN projection, the world population will reach 9.7 billion in 2050. The Worldometer provides the following contrasting scenario of the past 2020

Region	Population 2020	Population 2050	Increase (%)
Asia	4641054775	5290263118	13.99
Africa	1340598147	2489275458	85.68
Europe	747636026	710486313	- 4.97
North America	368869647	425200368	15.27
South America and the Caribbean	653962331	762432166	16.59
Oceania	42677813	57376367	34.44

and inadequate availability of nutrition, medicine, etc. So, the growth is mostly driven by higher fertility rates. According to World Bank data updated on September 16, 2022, 35 countries in the world had fertility rates above 4 in 2020 and all of them were African countries. The highest rate was 6.735 in Niger whereas the lowest was in South Korea at 0.857.

As reported by Our World in Data, the world

and future 2050

Again, in comparison to 2020 Africa's population is expected to grow by a staggering 85.68% by 2050. The land does not grow with the population rather per capita arable land decreases with the increase in population. Then there is also desertification. The Sahara Desert in north Africa which covers an area almost equal to the size of the USA is expanding steadily across 11 countries accord-

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