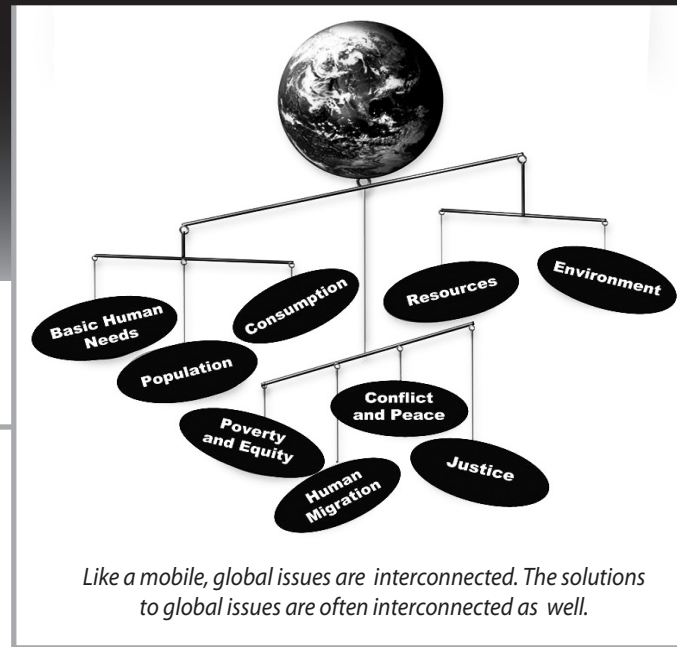


Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions

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Join us on Wednesdays and Fridays for Skills for Everyday Living, a series that goes beyond the classroom to prepare students for the many challenges of the real world. Our current topic is **Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions**, developed by *Facing the Future*. Series ends June 13.



How Are We Growing?

Each year there are more and more people on Earth. Population projections suggest that by 2050 there will be over 9 billion people living in the area where 6.6 billion of us live now.¹ How and where will world population change? With almost half of the world's population under age 25, world population will increase by several billion when those young people start families over the next few decades.² Currently 95 percent of all population growth occurs in developing countries. India is expected to soon surpass China as the world's most populous country. Meanwhile, shrinking populations are predicted for some developed countries such as Japan, Russia and the nations of Europe.³

These population statistics and trends have important consequences, especially when combined with other global issues such as poverty. Of the 5.2 billion people living in developing countries, nearly 60 percent do not have basic sanitation, and one-quarter lack proper housing. Twenty percent do not have access to modern health services, and 20 percent of children do not attend school through grade five.⁴ Given these harsh realities, people in poorer countries may rely on large extended families to make a living and to care for the elderly. For example, in rural areas, people need help to gather cooking fuel, carry water, grow food and tend livestock. Yet because disease and malnutrition (inadequate or unbalanced nutrition) kill many children before they grow up, large families are often seen as a necessity. This tends to keep fertility and population growth rates up, which can have the effect of perpetuating poverty, illness and conflict over limited resources.

How Many People Can the Earth Support?

An important concept in looking at population growth is that of Earth's "carrying capacity." Carrying capacity is the number of people the Earth can support without using resources faster than the planet can reproduce them. Experts disagree on this number because carrying capacity depends on a number of debatable factors: the type and quantity of available resources; how these resources are distributed; how much of the resource each person uses; and people's relative quality of life.

Another variable in determining carrying capacity is whether or not people believe that areas need to be left for plants and wildlife, in addition to providing for humans and their immediate needs.

Sustainable Solutions to the Population Puzzle

Population growth and the associated demand for resources bring urgency to other pressing global issues such as poverty, conflict and environmental degradation. Stabilizing population growth could allow humans to live within Earth's carrying capacity and improve quality of life for many people. Given that people in wealthier countries on average have large Ecological Footprints, reducing Footprints in these countries is another important way to live within the carrying capacity of the planet.

Personal Solutions

At some time in their lives, most people will need to make a decision about family size. Family planning is perhaps the most important personal solution to population growth and carrying capacity.

Because of relatively higher rates of consumption of the average person in the United States compared to many other parts of the world, reducing our Ecological

Footprint is another possible solution to population-related issues. Here are a few ideas to get you started on shrinking your Footprint:

- If you or your family is going to buy a new car, consider getting one that is fuel-efficient and minimally polluting.
- Whenever you can, use your feet, a bicycle, a skateboard or take a bus to get around.
- Eat one fewer meal including meat each week. Production of meat requires many more resources than production of nonmeat protein sources.

Can you think of other humane ways in which individuals can personally address population growth and carrying capacity issues?

Structural Solutions

Many structural actions can be taken to help stabilize human population growth. One important step is providing primary health care around the world in order to lower infant and child mortality, increase life expectancies and provide other essential services. If families had access to basic health care — which prevents most childhood deaths — many families would have only the number of children that they ideally want. Reproductive health care is an important part of primary health care.

1 *Population Reference Bureau, "2007 World Population Data Sheet,"* http://www.prb.org/pdf07/07WPDS_Eng.pdf

2 *U.N. Population Fund, "State of World Population 2003,"* <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2003/swpmain.htm>.

3 *U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision,"* <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/WPP2004/wpp2004.htm>.

4 *U.N. Family Planning Association, "The State of World Population 2001,"* <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2001/english/ch01.html>.

Activity

❖ According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 1950, the population of Seattle was 467,591. Visit www.census.gov to find out the population of Seattle in 2000. Calculate the rate of increase from 1950 through 2000. Based on your findings, estimate the population in the year 2050. Then answer the following questions:

- How will your life change as a result of increasing population?
- In what ways do you think Seattle will look different in 2050?

Take Action!

❖ Find alternative uses for materials currently being thrown in landfills (such as tires, cell phones and computers) in your community. Develop a project to support the reuse of at least one of these items in your home, school or community.