

Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition Submission Template

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Summary:

"Faced with a food and energy crisis, how can society improve its well-being?"

Living creatures are structures of high molecular complexity. As a result of the entropy law, any life needs continuous flow of degradable energy and food to defend against chaos (Henning, 2005). The biosphere draws all energy from the solar radiation. Photosynthetic process converts solar radiation energy into storable chemical energy in plant food.

The world population of 6.5 billion at a growth of 2.2% is expected to attain 13 billion by 2067. Present world food and energy crises makes one to ponder if human kind shall thrive any better coping with the pressure on limited food and energy resources.

Essay:

Energy and food crises are intricately linked, affecting each other in a cyclical manner. Skyrocketing oil prices cause rising food prices in two ways. First, when farmers spend much money to fuel their tractors and buy agrochemicals etc. they will have to charge more for what they produce. Second, higher oil prices are causing farmers to switch from producing food crops to producing bio fuel crops. It's thus eminent that the law of demand and supply will call for an increase in the price of food both locally and in the international markets. Higher food prices limit people's ability to obtain not only food and energy required for a healthy and sustainable livelihood, but also other essential goods and services, including education and health care.

Recent increases in the price of food and energy in all its forms is having a direct and adverse effect on the poor. Poor people who do not produce their own food are the most severely hurt because a larger proportion of their expenditure is allocated to food and energy.

The future of man and the quality of life will depend first and foremost on food and energy. The scenario depends on population growth and the resource demand resulting from it. The problems (crises) of food and energy are all secondary to the population problem. It is the awful acceleration of the growth rate that is so alarming together with the resulting acceleration of demand placed upon the environment. The assessment of any scheme to feed more people involves the vital contribution of fossil fuel energy. This energy in harvested food is still the energy sunlight trapped during photosynthesis, but fossil fuels enable the farmers to remove the factors that limit the process of photosynthesis.

Given the present rate of population growth and the impact this has on available natural resources, an important question which begs for serious reconsideration is: "Are we stocked with the planet earth"? Is there any possibility that current world population crises of food and energy could be resolved by emigration to another planet? This

human exportation to any planet that may be is astronomically expensive. Perhaps people could migrate to the Amazon valley or the USA with some sparsely populated expanse of land. Could this serve as a solution to the energy and foods crises? In effect, the cost of clearing such juggled is relatively cheap with advancement in technology but this does not give man the guarantee for an easy evacuation to the vast uninhabited lands. Could India for example solve its population increase this way even with outside help? In this country, UN estimate holds that each year 21 million children are born and each year 9 million people die giving an annual net gain of about 12 million. If there were places to go and we use the US long jet flights of 600 planes, each carrying 150 people twice a week, we could still handle only 70 % of India's annual increase.

Others suggest that humans are already finding a way to take care of the population problem as evidenced by declining birth rates everywhere in the world. Declining birth rates don't necessarily translate into declining populations, however. The United Nations (UN) Population Division projects that by 2050, global population could reach 9.1 billion.

Sub-Saharan Africa has been identified as the highest hit by food and energy crises in the world today. Prominent amongst the causes to these crises are bad governance, uncontrolled population growth, soil fertility problems, inadequate application of research results, and lack of investment in agriculture by the private sector, inconsistent agricultural policies, neglect of small-scale farmers, poor marketing, poor rural development strategies, overexploitation of available natural resources including fossil fuel and neglect of women in agriculture. Others are poor funding of agricultural research, paucity of extension services, and lack of effective communication among key players in the agricultural sector. To make things worse the limited food resources are now being used in the production of bio fuel while a vast portion of the world population languish in abject poverty, misery and hunger. UN estimates a 1.08 dollar/person per day in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Although much has been said and done both at national and international levels with respect to food and energy crises situation, about one billion people in the world remain hungry (FAO 2008 report). Can present day global warming be held responsible for this or is man just being careless about his own very existence on the planet earth? Whether global warming or not, man shall forever need food to eat and fuel (energy) to run his daily activities. For time immemorial has man been using his resources in sustainable manner?

Perhaps the production of genetically modified food could help solve the food and energy crises. This topic is the subject of acrimonious debate, and both sides of the argument are defending their data vigorously. Results in the support of the arguments brought forth by critics are more often flawed and do not hold up to scientific scrutiny. If biotechnology in the production of genetically modified food is to be adopted as a remedy to the food and energy crises, then developing countries might have to lag behind because of the expensive nature of the technology.

To this end therefore, there is need for North South cooperation/dialogue on sustainable management of food and energy more than ever before. The richer countries of the North though equally plagued with the same problem should not only assist the poorer South with food and energy, but they should be able to cooperate with them on the technology needed to manage these vital ends in a sustainable manner.

Present day trend has shown that an enormous capacity of industrial production has led to an ethic of consumption -“more is better”. We need to replace this for posterity sake with an ethic of conservation so as to achieve equilibrium or a steady state between population demand and resource supply especially of food and energy.

References:

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- Henning et al, 2005: **Sustainable Development and Innovation in the Energy Sector**, Springer Publishers.
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