

Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition Submission Template

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Summary:

There is enough food and energy to fulfil everyone's needs, but due to poverty and unsustainable energy use the world is facing food and energy crises. This essay proposes that the crises can be solved by simultaneously fighting poverty and developing a sustainable energy system. This can be achieved through the adoption of different policy instruments that transfer the responsibility to change from individuals and corporations to the authorities. Creating the political will to make this change is, so far, the largest challenge the World Community has faced in this recently globalized world.

Essay:

Facing the food and energy crises measures must be taken on all levels, from the individual to the global community. Western society of today boasts a previously unrivalled affluence where seemingly neither a lack of food nor energy is present. However, this is not entirely true; even though there is enough reasonably cheap energy available today the issue of global warming demands a change in energy systems. The situation in the rest of the world is worse – one quarter of the world population has no access to electricity and one out of seven people are suffering from undernourishment.

The developing world's lack of utilities does not stem from a scarcity of resources, there is enough food to keep everyone satisfied and energy from the sun is plentiful. Bearing this in mind the question why not everyone is living under decent conditions is raised. In the case of food and fuel the reason is lack of purchasing power and in the case of electricity limited generating ability and grid availability are also factors. The solution to these problems is to reduce poverty since it would strengthen the purchasing power, and thereby increase the availability of food and energy.

In order to fight poverty, and thereby reduce the impact of the crises, many different measures must be taken and work alongside one another. It is essential in poor areas to invest in health, education and infrastructure as well as economic support, for example in the form of micro credit loans, and legal issues such as land ownership reforms. Unfortunately, increasing the welfare of the poor people in the world will put further strain on the environment as the demand for energy will increase. Many developing countries do not want to participate in international agreements aiming to reduce green house gas emissions arguing that it is not reasonable to deny them the same possibilities to develop that Western society has had. Therefore it is crucial to have a parallel development of sustainable energy technologies which would allow the developing countries to industrialize relying on clean and abundant energy sources.

The energy crisis of the industrialized society is a consequence of unsustainable exploitation of non-renewable natural resources. The use of coal, oil and natural gas pollute the environment and greatly contribute to the greenhouse effect. Today there exist carbon neutral technologies with the potential to replace the old system but making them economically feasible is a difficult task. Furthermore, replacing the energy system

will probably not be enough, energy efficiency gains and life style changes will be necessary.

The process of switching from the existing energy system to a sustainable one is expensive in monetary terms and will not occur spontaneously. In order for change to start happening economic incitements are needed. This could be in the form of a price on carbon combined with funding of the development and commercialization of new technologies. Since the population and total welfare of the world is growing rapidly more efficient energy use might prove to be the most important factor. Energy efficiency can be achieved through the introduction of a carbon price and efficiency standards on energy demanding equipment. These measures combined will force people to change their lifestyles to reduce their energy consumption, making a step by step action plan necessary to achieve public acceptance.

There are many effective ways to deal with the energy and food crises so the dilemma is not whether or not something can be done but whose responsibility it is to take action. Does the responsibility lie with the individual, the corporate sphere or with the government?

The issue is more of a practical nature than moral. Even with the highest moral standards an individual has a hard time making a real difference, and corporate responsibility has proven not to be enough. Consequently the responsibility must lie with the authorities, which can be problematic since the political will to change is not always present. Through globalization the world has gained new opportunities to deal with issues demanding cooperation. This implies that what is most important is for the World Community to acknowledge that there are ongoing crises and to create the political will needed to solve them.

In conclusion, policy instruments that relieve individuals and corporations of the responsibility to move towards sustainable development are the most powerful weapons in the battle against the food and energy crises. The hurdle to overcome is the politicians' unwillingness to acknowledge the problems and take action. The World Community has the prerequisites needed to solve the problems; human behaviour is what is keeping us from reaching a sustainable society. Knowing that mankind possesses all means to create welfare for every single person on this planet should be enough to inspire people to believe in a brighter future.