

Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition Submission Template

ID number: 946 *(insert your id number here)*

Summary:

(insert your summary here – maximum 100 words)

Our unrelenting quest for more and more industrialization, powered by cheap energy has indeed brought prosperity. Energy will continue to remain vital but not from the major source as we know it today- fossil fuels. This is so because its abundance or lack has been that of crisis and conflict. High energy prices triggered high food prices while cheap oil increases consumption which raises pollution levels. We should not bask in the euphoria that we have fared better than our forefathers, except we bequeath a healthy planet to our unborn kids by diversifying into a cleaner form of energy.

Essay:

(insert your summary here – maximum 1000 words)

In today's modern world, energy drives production and ensures a nation's economic and social well-being. Energy is needed in the processes that provides the basic needs of man (especially large scale agriculture) and in the up-lift of man's standard of living through healthcare, transportation, telecommunications etc. So lack of sufficient energy supply is like taking us back to the cave man era where life was at subsistence level. The World Bank reported recently that global food prices have risen by 83% over the last 3 years. The food crises as we know it, has been caused primarily by sky rocketing oil prices. Further opening Pandora's box is the action by western governments to divert edible grains for production of ethanol fuels, droughts and the ever increasing world population. This price escalation of basic food stuffs has caused riots in streets of Senegal, Yemen and Mexico, just to mention a few. A hungry man they say is an angry man; this growing anarchy is capable of destabilizing governments around the world and putting human lives and properties in jeopardy. Experts have proposed many solutions of feeding the world's billions of humans, from another green revolution to genetically manipulated crops unto freer trade and so on. This has only amounted to being a penny wise and a pound foolish because we fail to look at the root cause of the problem - unstable energy supply and solve it once and for all. This crises if not for anything should give us the opportunity to break the jinx of our over dependence on a single energy source- fossil fuels.

Societal well-being rest on a foundation of three pillars; economic, sociopolitical and environment. But most countries pursue only sociopolitical and economic growth at a grave cost to society. For too long, we have negated the environmental pillar which is also indispensable. Economist and development experts have modeled society's well-being around the gross domestic product (GDP) and more recently the human development index (HDI) which is misleading. By now we ought to develop and popularize an indicator that adjusts our domestic product per rate of carbon emission (pollution) to really ascertain our well-being. Improving societal well-being to me is about increasing our standard of living (prosperity) in a way that promotes peace and preserves the environment for future generations. To achieve these governments need to show resilience, in setting up a national energy and food sufficiency policy, where both are treated as matters of NATIONAL SECURITY.

Energy crisis can be solved when we source for alternative energy that is not only affordable and abundant but clean. Government leaders ought to know by now that global trade in energy and food is a likely political weapon that could be used to intimidate and bully a supply dependent nation, and must not risk it. Imagine what it feels like to be a national of either of these countries Georgia, Belarus or Ukraine and be subjected to constant threat of supply cut by Russia's state controlled gas monopoly Gazprom. This means your country can degenerate into anarchy at your supplier's whim. It is evident that pollution from years of oil exploration and gas flaring has contaminated rivers and farmlands thereby causing people lose their means of livelihood. Not to forget the lives that has been cut short by health complications from exposure to pollutants. The running conflict between the Ogonis in Niger Delta region of Nigeria and Royal Dutch Shell is not far from this. Governments must invest heavily on new technologies that promote renewable energy (wind, solar, hydro) which poses no harmful effects to the ecosystem. Energy and food supplies are too sensitive to be left entirely to the vagaries of international politics and market forces. Let's face it, would you like the global markets orchestrated by international politics decide whether you will eat your favorite meal tonight? Imagine a trip to your local food shop to purchase your favorite cereal and the shop keeper replies "please I'm very sorry; we have no supplies because the producing countries are not in support of our current political leadership". Little wonder why countries in Europe and America won't stop protecting its citizens through subsidies, which I feel any serious nation ought to put measures in ensuring some form of produce availability for its citizenry.

But then, most people argue that renewable energy cannot meet our energy needs in sustaining our standard of living, so we need to drill more oil. Improving quality of life is more dependent on how we use our energy than on how much of it we use or consume. The only meaningful way to better harness our renewable energy is to embrace efficiency and conservation. The current campaigns such as the "live earth" pop concerts which urges people to ensure efficiency by turning off household lights at day(peak time) and travelling less is all media hype and may not be sustained in the long-term. What happens if price of oil slumps? It will be more pollution as usual. Remarkably, more nations have now fallen in love with capitalism, so let's allow the markets punish the inefficient and those with tunnel vision via pricing. Surely, the invisible hand of the market alone won't be the silver bullet; we will need the visible hand of the government as well, through regulations. Regulators should be proactive in taxing oil majors heavily and on the other hand, make cleaner energy programs cheap and tax free and people will on their own change their habits. This is how to ensure energy efficiency.

The long-term policy has to be more market oriented, creating incentives for households to generate power in their own backyards and sell the excess supply back into the national grid. Societies were there is peace, even with nature, and allows private sector to thrive is the most critical platform to prosperity. It is suicidal to depend on others totally for energy and food. Nations only have one choice, produce locally or die.