

# Population

In 1800, at the start of the industrial revolution, the Earth's population stood at about 500 million. Today, it is a ten times greater -- 5.2 billion. At current rates it will double in less than 40 years. Most of this growth will take place in developing countries.

Some environmentalists believe that overpopulation is a fundamental cause of environmental degradation, and that famine in Ethiopia and other countries is a natural result. Some have even suggested that such famines are a regrettable, but natural, means of bringing population into "balance." However, the world produces more than enough food to feed its current population. For example, enough grain is produced to give everyone on Earth two loaves of bread a day. Even more could be produced through more efficient use of our agricultural resources.

The real problem is one of distribution -- of poverty and wealth. Most poor countries, Ethiopia included, could feed their own populations through agricultural and economic development. Done right, that development could occur in ways that do not cause environmental damage.

In fact, development also is linked to population. It is no accident that rich countries are approaching stable populations, while poor countries must deal with rapidly increasing numbers. Persons in impoverished societies tend to have more children, because children, and what they can earn, are essential to survival. Population growth cannot be limited without a worldwide attack on poverty.