

Here's Why Overpopulation is Just a Myth

Stopping overpopulation isn't how we save our planet.



[Zulie Rane](#) · [May 24, 2019](#) · 5 min read



Photo by [Christopher Burns](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The favorite pseudo-intellectual topic lately seems to be how to stop overpopulation in order to save our planet. What's consistently passing people by is the fact that *overpopulation is a myth*.

Whether people are talking about [famines](#), [natural disasters](#), the choice to [become a parent](#), [birth control](#), [abortion](#), or our own soon-to-happen [extinction event](#), folks will wade in to discuss it in terms of human overpopulation. How can we [stop poor people](#) from making so

many babies? Is it [morally right](#) to permit people under a certain IQ to reproduce?

If you haven't gotten the gist of why certain people are arguing, let me put it in simple terms: a surprisingly huge number of people believe that overpopulation is imminent, caused by human pressures and that only if we start throttling the reproduction of undesirables can we continue to live safely and happily on earth.

Here's why that's all wrong.

Medium

Our production consistently overmatches our consumption.

“We’re running out of food!” cry the hoarders. “Soon we will be eating more than we’re producing!”

That’s a lie. Historically, our food production has increased as our populations do. This isn’t just an artifact of the past: to take an example from this century, our global [cereal production](#) jumped a staggering 24% between 2004 and 2015.



“brown wheat field during daytime” by [Artur Nasyrov](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Over the millennia since becoming agriculturists, we have developed more and more efficient ways of producing calories and nutrients to feed ourselves. At our current level of production, we can produce more food than needed to [feed every single person](#) alive today.

Every day, there are new technologies in agriculture that allow us to pack more calories, more nutrients, more vitamins into the grains that feed the world. And there are no signs of slowing.

There are more than enough resources for everyone.

“But you can’t deny we’re using up our resources at an unsustainable rate!” you might argue. And you’d be right. [That’s true.](#)

Here’s the counterpoint: this isn’t because we’re overpopulated, or because we’re [not producing enough food](#). As mentioned above, we have more than enough to feed everyone as much as they need, with plenty to spare.

So why do we have widespread starvation and malnutrition? Why do many leading scientists think we face a human [extinction event](#)?

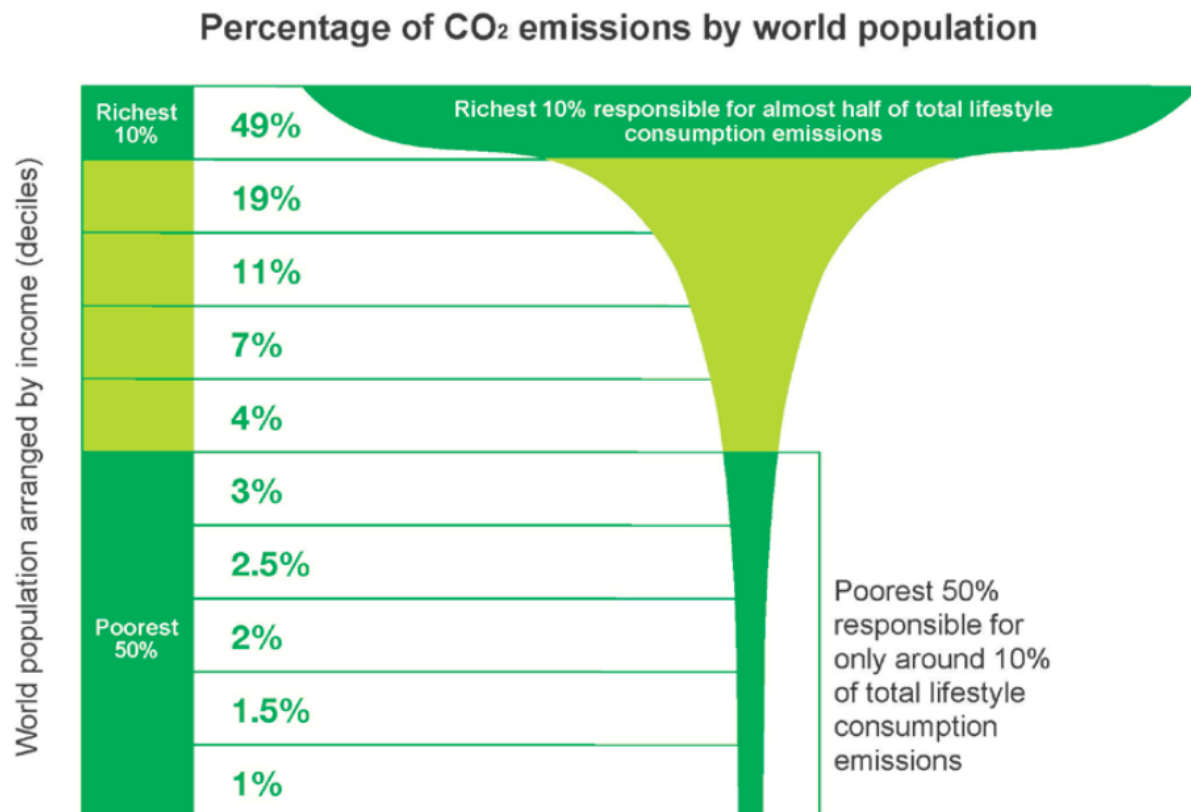
It’s because we’re just [bad at distributing](#) resources fairly and efficiently. In the States alone, [40% of all food](#) is wasted every year. But people don’t drive that.

As our population grows at the current rate, the consumption of resources is growing at a vastly different rate. The new babies being born every day are consuming the same amount as ever. So where is this excess and startling drop in resource availability coming from?

[Consumption](#). The richest countries in the world, though they are not increasing in population at the same rates as others, are consuming far, far, far more than their fair share. And within those countries, it’s not the people with large families who tend to drive this. It’s the ones at the very top, the richest, with cash to burn.

Look at a graph of where most of our global emissions come from and you’ll see there’s not much correlation between population and consumption of resources.

Figure 1: Global income deciles and associated lifestyle consumption emissions



From [Oxfam](#)

The richest 10% of the population is responsible for emitting over 50% of the lifestyle CO₂ emissions. The poorest 50% are responsible for only 10% of lifestyle emissions.

Wildly enough, the above graph has prompted some people to suggest we wall up to the wealthy population, and devote our time and resources to stopping people from becoming well off and presumably consuming more resources.

I can't believe I have to say this, but the way to slow our resource consumption is *not* by stopping other people from becoming more well off (as [some people](#) have suggested). Aside from being unthinkably cruel, it's unsustainable and pointless. The pattern of the last 10,000 years has for more people to become more wealthy and it won't stop now.

How can we curb this pattern of consumption?

If you've been keeping up with the arguments listed above, you'll find a lot of times, panicking people are looking for a person to point the finger of blame at.

And indeed, when we talk about overpopulation, a lot of times the mental image the pundits want you to conjure is one of poor, huddled masses, popping out new babies left, right and center because of their [lack of education](#).

But I hope it doesn't come as a surprise after you've read up to here when I say that blaming people in far-away countries for irresponsibly reproducing doesn't help. Claiming that we live in wealthier, wiser countries that are not contributing at all towards the decline of the planet, and implying that poorer, more

Medium

developing countries are the ones to blame is disingenuous at best, and [racist](#), [classist](#) and [sexist](#) at worst.

If you really are desperate for a place to lay the blame at and want to contribute to stopping our planet from failing our population, here are three things you can do:

1. **Stop the creation of extreme wealth.** Income inequality is a very real issue today and one to which many resources have already been devoted. If we decrease the vast quantities of wealth in that top 10%, we decrease resource consumption.
2. **Become more efficient.** This option relies more on creation rather than reduction. Develop new ways to increase green energy. Investigate a way to make plants more nutrient-dense.
3. **Empower women.** Educating and empowering women does both options: it [slows the growth](#) of the new resource consumers, coming from currently low-income areas. It also frees up an incredible

amount of [creative and intellectual talent](#) to help find new and better ways of doing things. It is the single best mitigation strategy.

If you actually care about ensuring everyone has fair and equal access to resources, here's what you can do.

Want to get involved with income equality? Check out these [ten solutions](#) to fighting economic inequality.

Feel like becoming a more efficient consumer of resources? Donate to a [scientific organization](#) of your choice, read about how you can [donate surplus food](#) instead of throwing it out, or learn how you can [make your household greener](#).

To empower women, donate or get involved with any [female empowerment group](#) you support. [Mentor](#) a young woman in your community. [Invest](#) in a small business owner.

We can help our planet recover from the current unsustainable rate of resource consumption. But overpopulation doesn't come into the question.