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THE PESSIMISTIC FUTURE OF EARTH IN THE FACE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

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ABSTRACT

Environmental issues resulting from climate change have become a growing concern for countries globally. However, despite growing concerns not much is done in terms of concrete actions for climate change mitigation efforts. This study highlights some environmental issues and the extent of their impact on developing and the developed countries. The study discusses environmental issues across two parameters; indicators of continued environmental degradation and the political dimension of environmental issues. The environmental degradation parameter discusses the issues of rising global temperatures and increased development. The political dimension on the other hand highlights the issues of global north and south divide and that of climate change denial. In this study the need for urgency and coordinated global effort is also emphasized in order to effectively combat environmental issues.

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INTRODUCTION

The earth is faced with a series of environmental issues that if not tackled effectively could lead to the end of all forms of life. Scientific evidence indicates that the

future of the planet earth will be fundamentally destabilized as natural disasters become a common occurrence (Frazen, 2019). The pessimism regarding the future of the planet is also realistic given the

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degree of fossil fuels emissions today and the inability to resort to renewable energy (Rees, 2019). Similarly, there is lack of agreement on how best to prevent further environmental degradation; governments, corporations, interest groups, and other stakeholders are often at odds. The issue of deteriorating climate conditions is also reflected in the sustainable development goals, particularly goal number 13 which mandates the need for climate action. This paper will provide justifications for pessimism regarding the future of the planet within two major premises. Firstly, discussing two of the major factors; rise in global temperatures and increased development which indicate continued environmental degradation, followed by a discussion of political aspects such as the global north and global south divide and the issue of climate denial.

RISING GLOBAL TEMPERATURES

Climate scientists claim that to prevent further environmental degradation and disasters there is a need to keep global increase in temperatures below the two degrees Celsius mark, however, even that seems rather impossible to maintain given our current trajectory (Titley, 2017). The extreme temperatures are also expected to become a common occurrence in the near future as it is predicted that by 2050, the once in a while heat spells that last for a few days at the moment would be seen frequently while colder temperatures are projected to occur more rarely (Cullen, 2010). The impact of continued global warming will be felt throughout the globe. Scientific predictions indicate that small island states such as the Maldives are prone to the adverse effect of climate change, in the worst-case scenario the entire country could be submerged completely in water by 2100 (World Bank, 2010). Climate change does not only impact small developing

nations such as the Maldives but also threatens the existence of more developed countries for instance Switzerland. Glaciers in Swiss Alps have melted recently due to the rising temperatures and pose the threat of flooding. Greenhouse gas emissions have increased average temperatures in the Swiss region causing loss of ice masses and increased incidence of avalanches, landslides, and floods (Wood, 2019). Similar environmental changes from global temperature rise could result in disastrous consequences faced by the locals in both developed and developing world as evident from the case of Switzerland and Maldives.

GREEN HOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Ever since the industrial revolution the climate has suffered greatly, the emissions of greenhouse gasses increased as activities such as manufacturing, and burning fossil fuels to power vehicles and factories took place (Mgbemene, Nnaji, & Nwozor, 2016). As countries develop there is a corresponding increase in the size of cities due to urbanization as a greater number of people move to metropolitan areas to get better employment opportunities. Consequently, the resulting urban sprawl in addition to ruining air quality also contributes to water pollution and sanitation issues, further deteriorating the environment. Therefore as countries develop and cities continue to grow the future of our planet remains in jeopardy.

Industrialization and Urbanization

In the contemporary world more developed countries exert greater influence in the global world order. Developing countries on the other hand are undertaking significant industrialization and urbanization efforts as well to match up to their developed counterparts; however, that comes at an environmental cost. For instance, India as an

emerging economy has faced adverse impacts of development evident in New Delhi which ranks among cities with poorest air quality attributed to industrial growth and increased presence of vehicles on the city's roads; residents of the city as a result are exposed to toxic gasses and hazardous wastes (Singh & Grover, 2016). The Indian experience is just one instance, as emerging economies throughout the globe continue to compete on the basis of development, environmental degradation would worsen. As a result, air and water quality in metropolitan cities will deteriorate accompanied by an increased incidence of diseases such as asthma and typhoid (Torrey, 2004).

GLOBAL POLITICAL CONSENSUS

The political dimension of environmental issues can be problematic as well for our future. Environmental issues are a global problem and therefore require global solutions. While all countries acknowledge environmental issues as serious problems, there is disagreement over how best to deal with these problems. The division among developed and developing countries is another area of contention in the global environmental politics arena as developing countries want developed ones to pay the price for their contribution to environmental degradation by limiting their future emissions. The global north and the global south are often at odds regarding formulation of effective strategies to curb environmental issues. There are also demands by the south for the global north to undertake most of the efforts aimed at climate change mitigation as the global north has contributed most to environmental degradation over the years while the south gets to bear costs of it. If the rivalries among the global north and south continue in the future the possibility of

resolving environmental issues becomes even bleaker.

North-South Divide

The global north and south divide also bring into question the notion of environmental justice. While environmental issues affect all countries, they have particularly harsher consequences for the global south as it lacks the resources to adequately deal with the challenges posed by climate change. For instance, poor and indigenous people in the African countries often lose their lives to natural disasters as they lack the resources to cope. Similarly, in the South Asian region, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have faced increasingly destructive monsoon seasons (Wheeling, 2017). As a result, a large number of people are displaced, these floods damage crops as well which leads to loss of livelihood for people who earn their living through agriculture which is a major source of income for South Asian economies. Therefore, as long as the global north and south divide continues to deepen, people of the global south will continue to be particularly worst hit by the disastrous consequences of climate change.

IMPEDIMENTS TO CLIMATE ACTION

The first step to solving any problem is acknowledging its existence. However, the existence of large groups of climate deniers that see environmental challenges as a mere hoax means that we may never be able to successfully deal with environmental challenges as they are not thought of as a problem in the first place. A significant aspect of climate denial is that the skepticism regarding climate change is often tactfully perpetrated by organized groups recognized as 'denial machinery' funded by wealthy industrialists and corporations (Jylhä, 2016). Climate denial has also infiltrated the arena of politics whereby elected officials, political leaders,

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and interest groups have refuted the concept of climate change (Mann & Toles, 2016). The influence of climate denial in the arena of politics is evident in the case of the US particularly since Trump took office and his withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. Similarly, in Brazil President Jair Bolsonaro also has often expressed views of climate denial, this became particularly evident during the Amazonian fires incident as he blamed people for deliberately starting fires. Bolsonaro's views are a product of his nationalistic politics; his government has contempt for environmental protection policies which they see as impediments to economic growth and development (Tharoor, 2019).

EARTH, OUR ONLY HOME

The planet earth is our only home, while there have been recent discoveries regarding life beyond earth there is no concrete evidence yet to prove any of the other planets can be livable. Therefore, to protect our future generation from the catastrophic environmental disasters we need to take action now before it is too late. Lastly, the only way to successfully deal with environmental issues is through coordinated global efforts and as matters of urgency.

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