

## Humanity's Creativity in Action<sup>63</sup>

Julian Simon found that “[t]he most important economic effect of population size and growth is the contribution of additional people to our stock of useful knowledge. And this contribution is great enough in the long run to overcome all the costs of population growth.” When faced with population-related problems, “[w]e will respond to conditions, whether that will involve zoning to prevent overcrowding, or adding people – probably immigrants – where people are needed and wanted. We are a responsive species.” This basic theory – that humans are creators and problem-solvers and respond to challenges with their creativity, rather than continuing to “destroy” – highlights the incredible value of humanity. This human creativity can provide limitless opportunities to eliminate poverty and poverty-induced problems.

Human creativity is evident in many areas, and the pattern is the same: as the population increases, there are short-term negative effects as the existing resources are overtaxed. Then human ingenuity steps in and presents solutions. For example, in the area of food supply, a growing population drives up prices in the short run because of increased scarcity, but these higher prices attract potential entrepreneurs who create new solutions, which then causes prices to decrease. The supply of food has increased, despite Ehrlich's claim that “the world is rapidly running out of food.” This increase resulted from improvements in agricultural knowledge due to research and development and from a better transportation network that can deliver food efficiently and quickly. An increase in population also corresponds to an increase in agricultural output because of an increase in farmed land. The increase in the amount of land that is farmed is people's response to the need for more food as the population grows. This has occurred in Ireland, China, and Burma. The amount of available arable land is ever increasing because people improve poor land, including reclaiming wasteland. This is combined with increasing productivity of food per unit of land, with higher crop yields, resulting in less need for agricultural land.

Furthermore, when the population or the income level of a country grows, there is more demand for the invention and development of capital goods, such as machinery, tools, and factories. While demand increases due to a larger population, so does supply, because there are more potential inventors and developers of the needed capital goods. Since people need tools to create other goods, the introduction of capital goods facilitates the creation and provision of goods and services to the population.

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<sup>63</sup> Sustainable Development White Paper by World Youth Alliance, available at [https://www.wya.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Sustainable\\_Development\\_White\\_Paper.pdf](https://www.wya.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Sustainable_Development_White_Paper.pdf) (last visited Nov 23, 2022).

An increasing population also requires improved transportation infrastructure and networks, and it makes investment in transportation more cost-effective. When the population grows, the transportation system is overtaxed, causing problems in the short term. However, responding to these conditions, businesses, the government, and private citizens invest in and create new roads and facilities. While this is expensive, it ultimately leads to more economic growth and facilitates communications; transportation is critical to any economy because it carries products, people, and messages. For instance, an effect of improved transportation is a decrease in disease and famine since people have easier and cheaper access to goods. On the other hand, where the population is sparse, good transportation is not necessarily economical and thus transportation is consistently poorer in those locations.

**QUESTIONS FOR A DISCUSSION:**

According to Simon, how does population growth affect our stock of useful knowledge? Explain.

What are the short-term negative effects of population growth? What happens in the long-term and how is it connected to creativity?

What happens in the long-term with the invention of capital goods, such as machinery, tools and factories?

What happens with transportation as a population grows?