

STATE OF THE WORLD FACTS:

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- In the past 50 years, humans have consumed more resources than in all previous history. *U.S. EPA, 2009. Sustainable Materials Management: The Road Ahead.*
- Each year we fill enough garbage trucks to stretch from Earth halfway to the moon.
- And of course, not all trash even makes it to the landfill. The [Great Pacific Garbage Patch](#), which is a swirling vortex of waste and debris in the Pacific Ocean, covers an area twice the size of the continental U.S. and is believed to hold almost 100 million tons of garbage.
- The [human population on earth](#) has grown more in the last 50 years than it did in the previous 4 million years
- Every day 50 to 100 species of plants and [animals](#) become extinct as their habitat and human influences destroy them.
- One in four of the world's 5,487 known [mammal species](#) face extinction
- Every *day* 40,000 [children](#) die from preventable diseases.
- 63,000 square miles of Rainforests are being destroyed each year... or 50 million acres.
- Less than 1% of the [world's freshwater](#) is readily available for human use. The amount of water that's safe for us to use is declining sharply due to pollution and contamination

- Half the world's tropical and temperate forests are now gone. Only 4% of old growth forest now remains in the United States, which means, of course, that timber corporations have logged 96% of the original forests and the ecosystems dependent upon them. *U.S. EPA, 2009. Sustainable Materials Management: The Road Ahead.*

- 75% of marine fisheries are now overfished or fished to capacity. *U.S. EPA, 2009. Sustainable Materials Management: The Road Ahead.*
- Each year, 38 billion tons of pollutants are pumped into our air, water, and land. 120 million people now live in areas where the simple act of breathing can kill them.
- Each year in this country, over one million acres of parks, farms, and open space are bulldozed by development corporations.

- Each year in this country, over 20,000 acres of coastal wetlands and estuaries are filled in for development; and over 100,000 acres of wetlands are destroyed.

- Every eight months, oil run-off from our streets and driveways equivalent in volume to that carried by the Exxon Valdez, is emptied into our waters.

- 45% of this country's waterways are unsafe for recreation or consumption.

- Smog in this country forces 159,000 admissions to emergency rooms, 53,000 to be hospitalized, and 6 million to have asthma attacks each summer.

- 60% of all coastal rivers and bays in this country have been degraded by run-off and each summer, a biologically dead zone the size of Massachusetts forms in the Gulf of Mexico.

- Toxins causing cancer, known as persistent organic pollutants -- resulting from corporate research and development -- are now [found in the tissues of every living creature on this planet](#).

- Nuclear energy corporations have produced over 77,000 tons of high level nuclear waste that cannot be destroyed and will [remain radioactive for hundreds of thousands of years](#); and millions of tons of low level nuclear waste that must be isolated for hundreds and thousands of years.

- Carbon dioxide in our atmosphere is 30% more concentrated now than prior to the industrial age -- provoking [the fastest warming trend in the 21st Century](#) than at any other time in the history of human civilization.

- Half of all plants in the world, and over 11,000 animal species, are now threatened with extinction as a result of habitat destruction and hunting.
- Average temperatures will increase by as much as 12 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the 21st century if [greenhouse gas emissions](#) continue to rise at the current pace. Even a temperature rise of just 7.2 degrees Fahrenheit would create a catastrophic domino effect, wiping out hundreds of species, bringing extreme food and water shortages and causing floods that would displace hundreds of millions of people.
- If the entire world lived like the average American, [we'd need 5 planets](#) to provide enough resources. Even if you're the most dedicated tree hugger out there, if you're American, your carbon footprint is [still double](#) the per-capita average of most of the world. Though America would have to reduce our carbon-emitting habits by 83% in order to be sustainable, that's not quite as insurmountable as it sounds. A shift toward renewable energy, conservation, more efficient waste management and greater concentrations of people living in dense urban communities will go far toward decreasing our carbon footprint as a nation.

It's enough to make a person look for another perfectly good planet. And those, of course, as we know, are hard to find.

It also reminds me of a bumpersticker that became popular several years ago, that reads: "Beam me up Scotty, there's no intelligent life down here."

But there is intelligent life down here, right? From [Silent Spring](#) [1] to the Club of Rome's [Report in the 1970's](#), [2] to the annual [State of the World Report](#) [3] -- year in and year out -- good people document, in excruciating detail, the demise of nature and our communities.

And the major environmental groups in the United States have been doing this for years. In fact, if you look at their publications and webpages -- as we do from time to time -- you can find data galore -- a complete documenting of how quickly and thoroughly the planet is being destroyed, and us with it.

In addition to the major environmental groups -- like the [Sierra Club](#), the [Environmental Defense Fund](#), the [Natural Resources Defense Council](#) -- thousands of community groups composed of hundreds of thousands of good people -- perhaps millions -- across this nation, have been created.

Those community groups have seen something wrong with what the data reveals -- both on an academic and moral level -- and have both said that it isn't sustainable to use the planet the way it is being used -- that there is something morally and ethically wrong in destroying millions of years of evolution simply to manufacture X-boxes, SUV's, disposable cameras, and cheap toilet paper.

There's no shortage of people who have been paying attention, documenting our demise, and even proposing new ways for people, cities, and the nation to *generate* renewable energy, *practice* sustainable agriculture, *design* livable neighborhoods, *protect* quality of life.

So, after close to fifty years of environmental activism, after thousands of groups and hundreds of thousands of people have mobilized, after people have given over \$500 million a year to the major environmental groups in D.C., after millions of environmental permits have been issued and appealed by people and groups, after many environmental laws have been passed, after lawsuits galore have been filed, after solutions galore have been proposed, and after a slew of environmental regulatory agencies have been created, you would think that problems would have been solved and restoration begun.

You'd be wrong.

1. At least 80% of humanity lives on less than \$10 a day.^{Source 1}
2. More than 80 percent of the world's population lives in countries where income differentials are widening.^{Source 2}
3. The poorest 40 percent of the world's population accounts for 5 percent of global income. The richest 20 percent accounts for three-quarters of world income.^{Source 3}
4. According to UNICEF, 22,000 children die each day due to poverty. And they "die quietly in some of the poorest villages on earth, far removed from the scrutiny and the conscience of the world. Being meek and weak in life makes these dying multitudes even more invisible in death."^{Source 4}
5. Around 27-28 percent of all children in developing countries are estimated to be underweight or stunted. The two regions that account for the bulk of the deficit are South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

If current trends continue, the Millennium Development Goals target of halving the proportion of underweight children will be missed by 30 million children, largely because of slow progress in Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.^{Source 5}

6. Based on enrollment data, about 72 million children of primary school age in the developing world were not in school in 2005; 57 per cent of them were girls. And these are regarded as optimistic numbers.^{Source 6}

7. Nearly a billion people entered the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their names.^{Source 7}

8. Less than one per cent of what the world spent every year on weapons was needed to put every child into school by the year 2000 and yet it didn't happen.^{Source 8}

9. Infectious diseases continue to blight the lives of the poor across the world. An estimated 40 million people are living with HIV/AIDS, with 3 million deaths in 2004. Every year there are 350–500 million cases of malaria, with 1 million fatalities: Africa accounts for 90 percent of malarial deaths and African children account for over 80 percent of malaria victims worldwide.^{Source 9}

10. Water problems affect half of humanity:

- Some 1.1 billion people in developing countries have inadequate access to water, and 2.6 billion lack basic sanitation.
- Almost two in three people lacking access to clean water survive on less than \$2 a day, with one in three living on less than \$1 a day.
- More than 660 million people without sanitation live on less than \$2 a day, and more than 385 million on less than \$1 a day.
- Access to piped water into the household averages about 85% for the wealthiest 20% of the population, compared with 25% for the poorest 20%.
- 1.8 billion people who have access to a water source within 1 kilometre, but not in their house or yard, consume around 20 litres per day. In the United Kingdom the average person uses more than 50 litres of water a day flushing toilets (where average daily water usage is about 150 liters a day. The highest average water use in the world is in the US, at 600 liters day.)
- Some 1.8 million child deaths each year as a result of diarrhoea
- The loss of 443 million school days each year from water-related illness.
- Close to half of all people in developing countries suffering at any given time from a health problem caused by water and sanitation deficits.
- Millions of women spending several hours a day collecting water.
- To these human costs can be added the massive economic waste associated with the water and sanitation deficit.... The costs associated with health spending, productivity losses and labour diversions ... are greatest in some of the poorest countries. Sub-Saharan Africa loses about 5% of GDP, or some \$28.4 billion annually, a figure that exceeds total aid flows and debt relief to the region in 2003.^{Source 10}

11. Number of children in the world

2.2 billion

Number in poverty

1 billion (every second child)

Shelter, safe water and health

For the 1.9 billion children from the developing world, there are:

- 640 million without adequate shelter (1 in 3)
- 400 million with no access to safe water (1 in 5)
- 270 million with no access to health services (1 in 7)

Children out of education worldwide

121 million

Survival for children

Worldwide,

- 10.6 million died in 2003 before they reached the age of 5 (same as children population in France, Germany, Greece and Italy)
- 1.4 million die each year from lack of access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation

Health of children

Worldwide,

- 2.2 million children die each year because they are not immunized
- 15 million children orphaned due to HIV/AIDS (similar to the total children population in Germany or United Kingdom)

Source 11

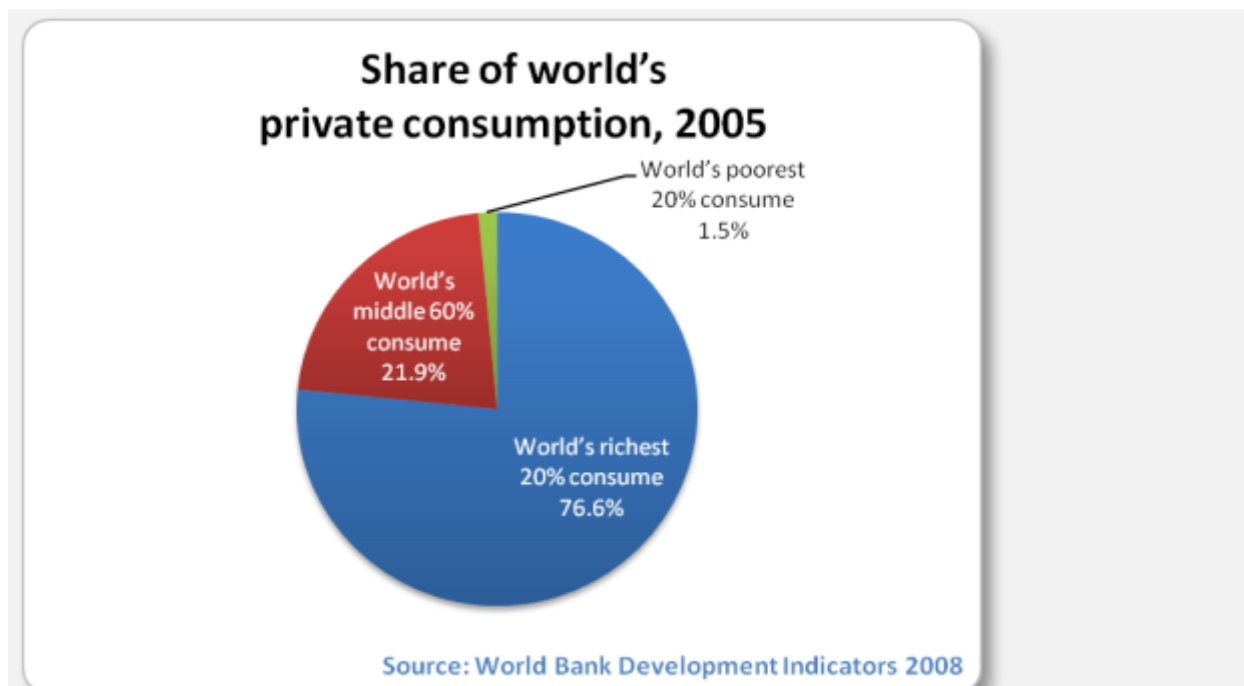
12. Rural areas account for three in every four people living on less than US\$1 a day and a similar share of the world population suffering from malnutrition. However, urbanization is not synonymous with human progress. Urban slum growth is outpacing urban growth by a wide margin.^{Source 12}

13. Approximately half the world's population now live in cities and towns. In 2005, one out of three urban dwellers (approximately 1 billion people) was living in slum conditions.^{Source 13}

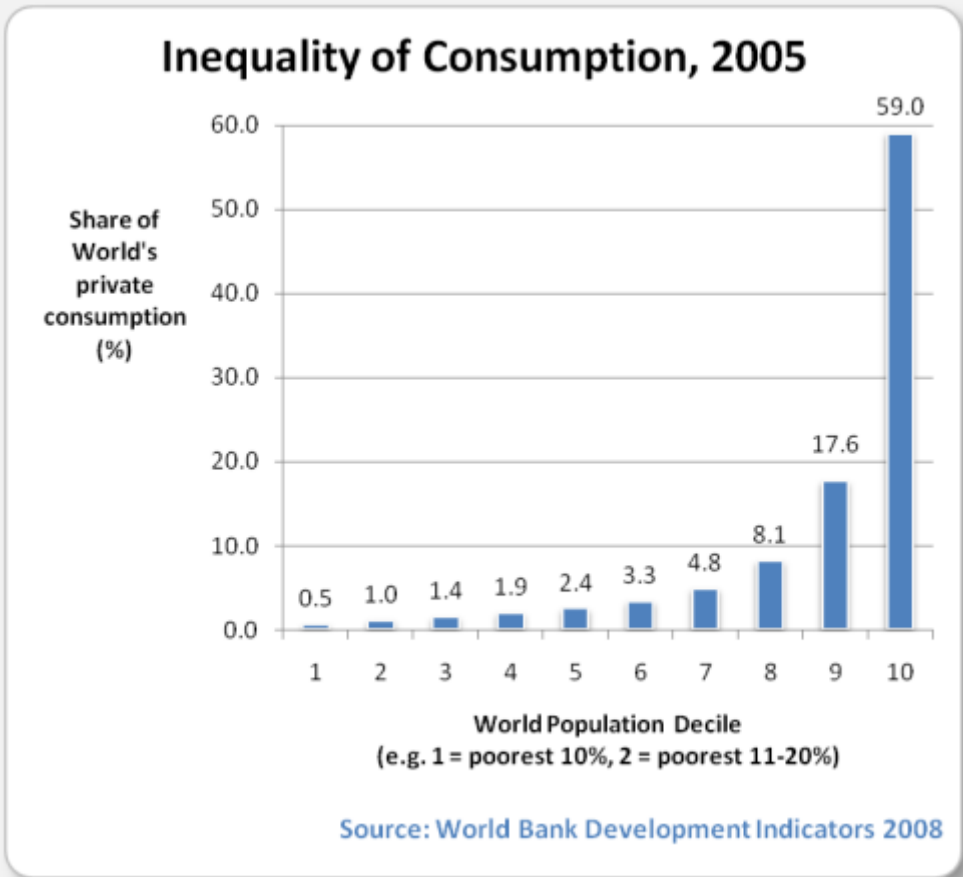
14. In developing countries some 2.5 billion people are forced to rely on biomass—fuelwood, charcoal and animal dung—to meet their energy needs for cooking. In sub-Saharan Africa, over 80 percent of the population depends on traditional biomass for cooking, as do over half of the populations of India and China.^{Source 14}

15. Indoor air pollution resulting from the use of solid fuels [by poorer segments of society] is a major killer. It claims the lives of 1.5 million people each year, more than half of them below the age of five; that is 4000 deaths a day. To put this number in context, it exceeds total deaths from malaria and rivals the number of deaths from tuberculosis.^{Source 15}

16. In 2005, the wealthiest 20% of the world accounted for 76.6% of total private consumption. The poorest fifth just 1.5%:



The poorest 10% accounted for just 0.5% and the wealthiest 10% accounted for 59% of all the consumption:



Source 16

17. 1.6 billion people — a quarter of humanity — live without electricity:

Breaking that down further:

Number of people living without electricity

Region	Millions without electricity
South Asia	706
Sub-Saharan Africa	547
East Asia	224
Other	101

18. The GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of the 41 Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (567 million people) is less than the wealth of the world's 7 richest people combined.^{Source 18}

19. World gross domestic product (world population approximately 6.5 billion) in 2006 was \$48.2 trillion in 2006.

- The world's wealthiest countries (approximately 1 billion people) accounted for \$36.6 trillion dollars (76%).
- The world's billionaires — just 497 people (approximately 0.000008% of the world's population) — were worth \$3.5 trillion (over 7% of world GDP).
- Low income countries (2.4 billion people) accounted for just \$1.6 trillion of GDP (3.3%)
- Middle income countries (3 billion people) made up the rest of GDP at just over \$10 trillion (20.7%).^{Source 19}

20. The world's low income countries (2.4 billion people) account for just 2.4% of world exports^{Source 20}

21. The total wealth of the top 8.3 million people around the world “rose 8.2 percent to \$30.8 trillion in 2004, giving them control of nearly a quarter of the world’s financial assets.”

In other words, about 0.13% of the world’s population controlled 25% of the world’s financial assets in 2004. [Source 21](#)

22. For every \$1 in aid a developing country receives, over \$25 is spent on debt repayment. [Source 22](#)

23. 51 percent of the world’s 100 hundred wealthiest bodies are corporations. [Source 23](#)

24. The wealthiest nation on Earth has the widest gap between rich and poor of any industrialized nation. [Source 24](#)

25. The poorer the country, the more likely it is that debt repayments are being extracted directly from people who neither contracted the loans nor received any of the money. [Source 25](#)

26. In 1960, the 20% of the world’s people in the richest countries had 30 times the income of the poorest 20% — in 1997, 74 times as much. [Source 26](#)

27. An analysis of long-term trends shows the distance between the richest and poorest countries was about:

- 3 to 1 in 1820
- 11 to 1 in 1913
- 35 to 1 in 1950
- 44 to 1 in 1973
- 72 to 1 in 1992 [Source 27](#)

28. “Approximately 790 million people in the developing world are still chronically undernourished, almost two-thirds of whom reside in Asia and the Pacific.” [Source 28](#)

29. For economic growth and almost all of the other indicators, the last 20 years [of the current form of globalization, from 1980 - 2000] have shown a very clear decline in progress as compared with the previous two decades [1960 - 1980]. For each indicator, countries were divided into five roughly equal groups, according to what level the countries had achieved by the start of the period (1960 or 1980). Among the findings:

- **Growth:** The fall in economic growth rates was most pronounced and across the board for all groups or countries.
- **Life Expectancy:** Progress in life expectancy was also reduced for 4 out of the 5 groups of countries, with the exception of the highest group (life expectancy 69-76 years).
- **Infant and Child Mortality:** Progress in reducing infant mortality was also considerably slower during the period of globalization (1980-1998) than over the previous two decades.
- **Education and literacy:** Progress in education also slowed during the period of globalization. [Source 29](#)

30. A mere 12 percent of the world’s population uses 85 percent of its water, and these 12 percent do not live in the Third World. [Source 30](#)

31. Consider the global priorities in spending in 1998

Global Priority	\$U.S. Billions
Cosmetics in the United States	8
Ice cream in Europe	11
Perfumes in Europe and the United States	12
Pet foods in Europe and the United States	17
Business entertainment in Japan	35
Cigarettes in Europe	50
Alcoholic drinks in Europe	105
Narcotics drugs in the world	400
Military spending in the world	780

32. And compare that to what was estimated as *additional* costs to achieve universal access to basic social services in all developing countries:

Global Priority	\$U.S. Billions
Basic education for all	6
Water and sanitation for all	9
Reproductive health for all women	12
Basic health and nutrition	13

33. Source 31

Notes and Sources

1. Sources:

- Shaohua Chen and Martin Ravallion, The developing world is poorer than we thought, but no less successful in the fight against poverty, World Bank, August 2008
- For the 95% on \$10 a day, see Martin Ravallion, Shaohua Chen and Prem Sangraula, Dollar a day revisited, World Bank, May 2008. They note that 95% of developing country population lived on less than \$10 a day. Using 2005 population numbers, this is equivalent to just under 79.7% of world population, and does *not* include populations living on less than \$10 a day from industrialized nations.

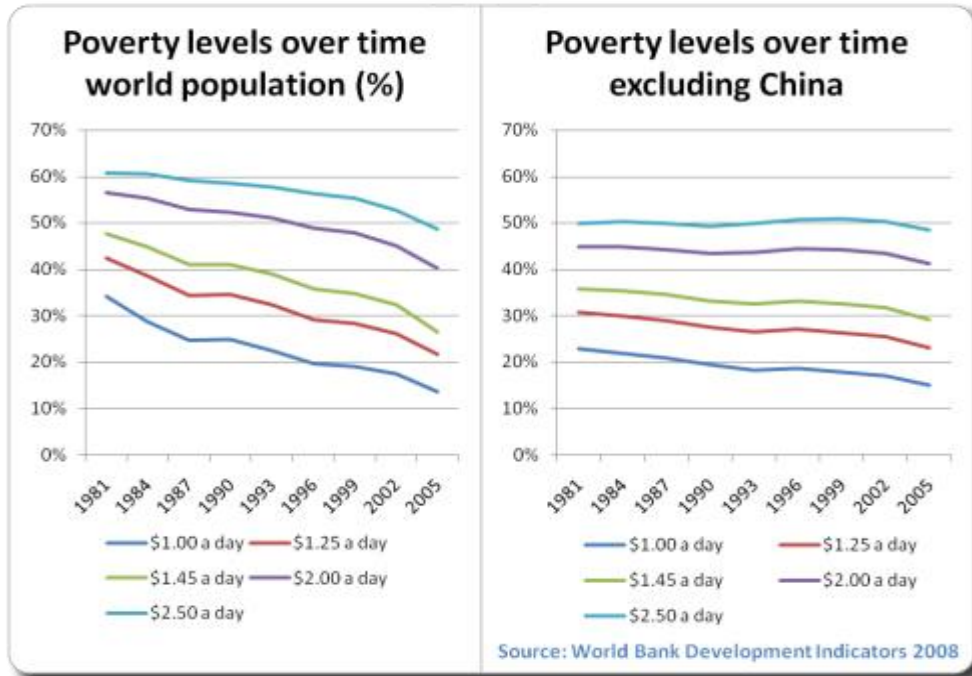
This figure is based on purchasing power parity (PPP), which basically suggests that prices of goods in countries tend to equate under floating exchange rates and therefore people would be able to purchase the same quantity of goods in any country for a given sum of money. That is, the notion that a dollar should buy the same amount in all countries. Hence if a poor person in a poor country living on a dollar a day moved to the U.S. with no changes to their income, they would still be living on a dollar a day.

The new poverty line of \$1.25 a day was recently announced by the World Bank (in 2008). For many years before that it had been \$1 a day. But the \$1 a day used then would be \$1.45 a day now if just inflation was accounted for.

The new figures from the World Bank therefore confirm concerns that poverty has not been reduced by as much as was hoped, although it certainly has dropped since 1981.

However, it appears that much of the poverty reduction in the last couple of decades almost exclusively comes from China:

- China's poverty rate fell from 85% to 15.9%, or by over 600 million people
- China accounts for nearly all the world's reduction in poverty
- Excluding China, poverty fell only by around 10%



The use of the poverty line of \$1 a day had long come under criticism for seeming arbitrary and using poor quality and limited data thus risking an underestimate of poverty. The \$1.25 a day level is accompanied with some additional explanations and reasoning, including that it is a common level found amongst the poorest countries, and that \$2.50 represents a typical poverty level amongst many more developing countries.

The \$10 dollar a day figure above is close to poverty levels in the US, so is provided here to give a more global perspective to these numbers, although the World Bank has felt it is not a meaningful number for the poorest because they are unfortunately unlikely to reach that level any time soon.

For further details on this (as well as some additional charts), see Poverty Around The World on this web site. [back](#)

1-2. 2007 Human Development Report (HDR), United Nations Development Program, November 27, 2007, p.25.

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2-3. Ibid

[back](#)


3-4. See [Today, around 21,000 children died around the world](#) from this web site. (Note that the statistic cited uses children as those under the age of five. If it was 6, or 7, the numbers would be even higher.)

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5. See the following:

- 2007 Human Development Report (HDR), United Nations Development Program, November 27, 2007, p.25. (The report also notes that although India is rising economically, “the bad news is that this has not been translated into accelerated progress in cutting under-nutrition. One-half of all rural children [in India] are underweight for their age—roughly the same proportion as in 1992.”)
- Millennium Development Goals Report 2007 

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~~4-6.~~ [Millennium Development Goals Report 2007](#) . The report importantly notes that “As high as this number seems, surveys show that it underestimates the actual number of children who, though enrolled, are not attending school. Moreover, neither enrolment nor attendance figures reflect children who do not attend school regularly. To make matters worse, official data are not usually available from countries in conflict or post-conflict situations. If data from these countries were reflected in global estimates, the enrolment picture would be even less optimistic.”

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~~5-7.~~ [The State of the World's Children, 1999](#), UNICEF

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~~6-8.~~ [State of the World](#), Issue 287 - Feb 1997, *New Internationalist*

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~~7-9.~~ [2007 Human Development Report \(HDR\), United Nations Development Program, November 27, 2007, p.25.](#)

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~~8-10.~~ [2006 United Nations Human Development Report](#), pp.6, 7, 35

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~~9-11.~~ [State of the World's Children, 2005](#), UNICEF

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~~10-12.~~ [2007 Human Development Report \(HDR\), United Nations Development Program, November 27, 2007, p.25.](#)

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~~11-13.~~ [Millennium Development Goals Report 2007](#) 

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~~12-14.~~ [Ibid](#), p.45

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~~13-15.~~ [Ibid](#), p.45

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~~14-16.~~ [World Development Indicators 2008, World Bank, August 2008](#)

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~~15-17.~~ Millennium Development Goals Report 2007  , p.44

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18. See the following:

- World Bank Key Development Data & Statistics, World Bank, accessed March 3, 2008
- Luisa Kroll and Allison Fass, The World's Richest People, Forbes, March 3, 2007
- World Bank's list of Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (41 countries), accessed March 3, 2008

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19. See the following:

- World Bank Key Development Data & Statistics, World Bank, accessed March 3, 2008
- Luisa Kroll and Allison Fass, The World's Richest People, Forbes, March 3, 2007

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~~16-20.~~ Trade Data, World Bank Data & Statistics, accessed March 3, 2008

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~~17-21.~~ Eileen Alt Powell, Some 600,000 join millionaire ranks in 2004, *Associate Press*, June 9, 2005

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22. Based on World Bank data (accessed March 3, 2008) as follows:

- Total debts of the developing world in 2006: \$2.7 trillion
- Total official development assistance in 2006: \$106 billion

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~~18-23.~~ **See the following:**

- [Holding Transnationals Accountable](#), *IPS*, August 11, 1998
- [Top 200: The Rise of Corporate Global Power](#), by Sarah Anderson and John Cavanagh, Institute for Policy Studies, November 2000

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~~19-24.~~ [Log cabin to White House? Not any more](#), *The Observer*, April 28, 2002

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~~20-25.~~ [Debt - The facts](#), Issue 312 - May 1999, *New Internationalist*

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~~21-26.~~ [1999 Human Development Report](#), *United Nations Development Programme*

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~~22-27.~~ *Ibid*

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| ~~23-28.~~ World Resources Institute Pilot Analysis of Global Ecosystems, February 2001, (in the [Food Feed and Fiber section](#)). Note, that despite the food production rate being better than population growth rate, there is still so much hunger around the world.

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| ~~24-29.~~ The Scorecard on Globalization 1980-2000: Twenty Years of Diminished Progress, by Mark Weisbrot, Dean Baker, Egor Kraev and Judy Chen, *Center for Economic Policy and Research*, August 2001.

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| ~~25-30.~~ Maude Barlow, [Water as Commodity - The Wrong Prescription](#), *The Institute for Food and Development Policy*, Backgrounder, Summer 2001, Vol. 7, No. 3

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| ~~26-31.~~ The state of human development, United Nations Human Development Report 1998, Chapter 1, p.37)