

# **Destruction of Habitats and the emergence of Pandemics**

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Many new and emerging viruses like SARS, Ebola, and now the Coronavirus have caused a global pandemic since 2002, and all of these have jumped from animals to humans. Three-fourth of the emerging pathogens that infect humans have leaped from animals, many of them had their habitat destroyed by humans to make land for crops, mining, housing and industrial use. The more we clear land for our use, the more we come into contact with such animals that carry pathogens that are capable of killing humans, and the more they are forced into smaller areas, the chance of them swapping infectious microbes and making new novel strains increases.

Stopping deforestation will not only reduce our exposure to new disasters, but also reduce the spread of many other diseases that have come from the forest habitats like Zika, Nipah, malaria, cholera and many others.

An average of 28 million hectares of forests have been cut down annually since 2016 and there are no signs of this slowing down. We are increasing our contact with wild animals every year, which is evidently going to increase the risk of a pandemic like the coronavirus happening again. People are hunting animals to sell meat and trafficking the infants creating an environment which is perfect for a virus or bacteria to cross that species and create a pandemic like the coronavirus. This pandemic will remain in the memories of people to be one of the biggest disasters in their lifetime, rivaling disasters like WW1, WW2 and the terror attacks on the world trade center in 2001.

The destruction of the environment is also contributing to the climate crisis. Climate change is a very real and dangerous threat that if left untouched, will spell the doom of humanity. And the time for us to act is slowly running out. With the rampant manufacturing and non ecological habits of humans, the destruction of the environment is increasing every year. The industrial revolution has brought with it many conveniences to humans, but it has also brought with it an everlasting damage to the environment. Not only industries, but also farming practices cast a huge threat to the environment. We are destroying the land slowly with poisonous chemicals. The selective breeding of many species has made it certain that many species will soon go extinct as there is no variation of crops that is being grown.

The pandemic has brought with it lock-downs which has helped in reducing pollution extensively. Many cities found their air being the cleanest in decades, and the waterways of Venice have cleared enough for them to support dolphin populations now. People have reported seeing a lot more stars in the night sky than before as the reduction in air pollution has cleaned the air enough for dim stars to be visible. This natural beauty of nature gives people the incentive to not go back to the polluted days.

Many believe that the future of economic growth lies in the future of ecological growth. If enough people are educated on the consequences of climate change, enough leverage can be gained to persuade the people in-charge to head towards a greener future. Reducing the use of fossil fuels is the obvious first step here, along with reducing the consumption of meat. Reducing industrial waste is the need of the hour. We have been hearing ways to become green for many years now, but very few people are actually able to implement it in their day-to-day life. We have taken massive strides towards a greener future, but there is still a lot of ground left to cover to build a sustainable planet.

There have been a number of instances where people are taking initiatives to become more ecologically conscious. The “Vegan” movement in the western world has been a huge success, where people are abandoning any form of meat/animal products, so as to reduce the livestock farming that takes place. More and more people are switching to electric cars from conventional cars that use fossil fuels.

In all this, there has been a businessman who has actually built many companies that focus towards building Eco-friendly alternatives to many conventional services- Elon Musk. Tesla is an automobile company built which solely builds electric cars, and also provides new technologies to make it more appealing for people to switch to electric cars. A whole supercharger network has been built in the USA which runs mostly on Solar power. The SolarCity project under Elon has made many people switch completely to solar energy to power their homes, making them independent from the electricity grid, thereby reducing the per person emissions. He also primarily uses solar energy to power the Tesla factories which has made the factories carbon neutral. His achievements help us carve a path to a more sustainable and Eco-friendly future. Many companies are aiming to go carbon neutral by the end of this decade.

Human practices have harmed the environment for a better part of 2 centuries now. New efforts and initiatives taken instill hope and help us realize the goal of reducing our carbon footprint to almost zero. With the decline in the destruction of the environment, we are bound to see improvements and see the number of such pandemics go down significantly.

#### References:

- 1.) [Stopping Deforestation can prevent pandemics : Scientific American](#)
- 2.) [Jane Goodall on Conservation, Climate Change and Covid-19: Ecowatch](#)