



environment

issue brief

What Is It?

Your surroundings, and how they influence your development.

More scientifically, environment is the complex set of physical, geographic, biological, social, cultural and political conditions that surround an individual or organism that ultimately determines its form and the nature of its survival.

The environment influences how people live and how societies develop. For that reason, people, progress, development and the environment are closely linked.

The environment can also pose risks. Air pollution, waterborne diseases, toxic chemicals and natural disasters are some of the challenges the environment presents for mankind.

Natural resources, land, water and forests are being degraded at an alarming rate in many countries—and once they are gone, they are gone!

For development to be sustainable—meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs—countries must take into account environmental concerns in addition to economic progress.

Concern for a sound global environment is essential in fighting poverty, as the poorest people tend to live in the most vulnerable places.

Why Should I Care?

Each year around the world:

- 3 million people die prematurely from waterborne diseases
- More than 700,000 children under 5 die from diarrhea in India alone
- 2 million people die from exposure to cooking stove smoke inside their homes. About half of these deaths occur in India and China. Most victims are children and women from poor rural families who lack access to safe water, sanitation and modern household fuels

Why Should I Care? (continued)

Each year around the world:

- 1 million people die from malaria; mostly in Sub-Saharan African countries
- 1 million people die from urban air pollution
- Respiratory infections, diarrhea and malaria account for almost 20% of deaths in developing countries, according to the World Health Organization's (WHO) Burden of Disease report.

Pollution has greater consequences:

- Fisheries are destroyed
- Crops are damaged
- Production costs rise for industries that must filter dirty air or water to maintain product quality

Extreme weather events (tornados, floods, hurricanes) are occurring more frequently and affecting more people than ever before. Poor people are the most vulnerable to environmental hazards.

As people move to cities from rural areas, environmental problems will increase. Rapid urbanization (Cities growing as people move from the countryside in search of better jobs and living conditions.) often creates a double burden for poor people living in slums.

What Is the International Community Doing?

Environmental sustainability is a major global concern and is one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

Many organizations are searching for ways natural resources can be used so they last our lifetimes and are available for generations to come.

International organizations like the World Bank work with developing countries to address and consider

THINK ABOUT IT

An Example of an Environmental Challenge

Over-fishing may boost fishermen's income for a few years. But if fish aren't properly conserved, and fisheries collapse, many more people will no longer have a source of income and nutritious, staple food.

IT'S A FACT

A Community's Destiny at the Mercy of Natural Disasters

Natural disasters can change a community's destiny in the blink of an eye and wipe out years of development initiatives. For example:

The Bam **earthquake** in southern Iran in December 2003 claimed 43,000 lives and flattened the city.

The **tsunami** in December 2004 devastated the coasts of the countries surrounding the Indian Ocean, decimating villages and towns and leaving survivors homeless.

LEARN MORE

Check out these sites to learn more about environment and ways you can help.

Conservation International
www.conservation.org

Fauna & Flora International
www.fauna-flora.org

Greenpeace
www.greenpeace.org

National Geographic
www.nationalgeographic.org

Nature Conservancy
www.nature.org/volunteer

Roots & Shoots
www.rootsandshoots.org/aboutus/

World Wildlife Fund
www.wwf.org

YouthXChange
www.youthxchange.net

What Is the International Community Doing? (continued)

environmental challenges and concerns as countries continue to develop.

Countries and societies will make different choices about environmental priorities, but these choices have to be based on good analysis and the participation of all groups that will be affected by them.

Balancing and simultaneously achieving economic, social and environmental progress is difficult and often requires difficult tradeoffs. These tradeoffs among generations, social groups, and countries influence what different people see as sustainable development.

Concern for a sound global environment is an essential part of the World Bank's work to fight poverty. Environmental health—cleaning up the environment so that millions of people can live healthier lives—is especially important in this work.

The World Bank lends money to countries for environmental projects. It also requires environmental safeguards when lending money for many development projects.

Some international initiatives concerned with the environment include:

- **Global Environment Facility** (GEF) (www.thegef.org) works on biodiversity conservation, climate change, ozone depleting substances, and international waters.
- **Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol** (MP) (www.multilateralfund.org) works to reverse the deterioration of the Earth's ozone layer.
- **Carbon Finance Business** (www.carbonfinance.org), part of the global effort to combat climate change, is working to create a global carbon market to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases.
- **Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund** (CEPF) (www.cepf.net) safeguards developing countries' biodiversity hotspots
- **World Bank/WWF Alliance for Forest Conservation and Sustainable Use** (web18.worldbank.org/ESSD/envext.nsf/80ByDocName/WBWWFForestAlliance) aims to create and secure highly threatened protected areas, and certify production forests as sustainable.

What Can I Do?

Check out **I Buy Different**, www.ibuydifferent.org, for ideas on how you can help and have an impact.

Become an activist for your earth! Start by exploring if the "good stuff" is really all that good, in **WorldWatch's "Good Stuff?"** (www.worldwatch.org/pubs/goodstuff) a behind-the-scenes look at the things we use on a daily basis.