



Photo: Winnie Ogana

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen continued major environmental damage around the world. Annual forest loss between 2000 and 2005 is estimated at 7.3 million hectares – an area the size of Sierra Leone or Panama, and equivalent to 200 sq. km per day (1). The proportion of the world’s fish stocks that are over-exploited and depleted has increased from about 10% in the mid-1970s to close to 25% in the early 2000s (2).

World population continues to grow so demands on the world’s resources will also rise. Environmental pressure, however, is rising faster than population growth. Global freshwater consumption rose sixfold between 1900 and 1995 — more than twice the rate of population growth. About one third of the world’s population already lives in countries considered to be “water stressed” — that is, where consumption exceeds 10 per cent of total supply. If present trends continue, two out of every three people on earth will live in that condition by 2025 (3).

While average standards of living have risen, the gap between the very rich and the very poor has widened. Poor people and nations suffer the effects of environmental damage more severely than the rich.

## Environmental problems are global problems:

- deforestation in one country can cause water shortages in neighbouring countries.
- toxic waste dumped in oceans is carried by currents and affects the fish supply everywhere.
- industrial pollution causes acid rain to fall over large areas, threatening the food chain.
- global warming is causing malaria to spread to new areas and to re-emerge in areas where it was under control or eradicated (4).

How will the world reduce the pressure on resources like soil, water, forests and air? Will environmental damage halt the last 30 years’ progress in nutrition, health, life expectancy and education? How can development provide for the needs, not just of the present generation but of future generations as well? World Vision is working to find positive answers to these questions.

## How are poverty and environmental issues related?

The relationships between human activity and the natural environment are complex. People everywhere consume water,



Dombezile plays with some of the stones that are so readily available on once fertile farmland. Soil and wind erosion, together with overgrazing and land clearing for human settlement, have eroded the land down to its rocky base. Photo: Winnie Ogana, World Vision.

food, energy and other natural resources in order to live. All economic activity is based on resources from nature. Any productive activity can deplete natural resources and cause environmental stress.

On the other hand, environmental problems can prevent people reaching an acceptable standard of living. This is particularly true for poor people, who tend to rely more directly on their environment for survival than the wealthy. But all people, not just the poor, need to work for environmental protection to ensure our long-term survival and well-being.

**Poverty often causes people to put pressure on the environment:**

- high death rates and lack of security in old age can lead to having more children.
- difficulty in meeting community needs often leads to pressure on land, over-exploitation of soils and deforestation.
- many people living in poverty work on the land but do not have access to training on how to protect the environment. This puts increased pressure on the land and results in the decline of crop yields.
- limited access to sanitation results in poor hygiene practices.

**Environmental problems cause more suffering among the poor:**

- overcrowded urban areas increase the risk of disease.
- shortages of wood for fuel and other uses make it more expensive to buy.
- soil erosion and deforestation cause declining crop yields.
- environmental damage increases the impact of floods and other disasters.

**Rural environments, urban environments**

Throughout the world, the poorest people are increasingly clustered in remote and ecologically fragile areas and around the edges of growing urban areas. In rural districts, the best land tends to be taken over by wealthy farmers, who can afford modern technology to farm large areas. Poor people are pushed out of these areas and are pressured to occupy and exploit more fragile lands including hillsides, rainforests and arid areas. It's harder to grow good crops on these marginal areas, so this results in increased poverty, and even more pressure on over-exploited lands.

Increasingly, poor rural people move to urban areas in search of better work opportunities. Throughout the developing world the populations of large cities are growing rapidly, and there are often shortages of jobs, housing and facilities such as electricity and clean water supplies. Cities in developed countries also experience these pressures as they grow. However, developed countries tend to have better infrastructure and are more able to provide for people's basic needs.

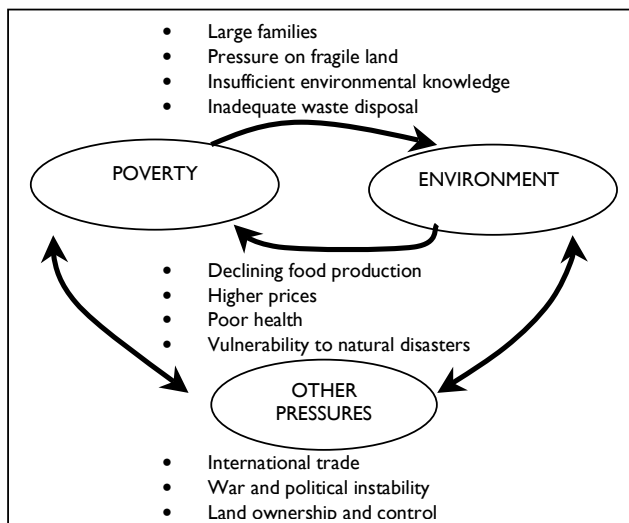


Diagram of poverty/environment relations

# Protecting the Environment and the Poor

## Drought-proofing a community

While many farmers in Malawi (Southern Africa) struggle to feed their families because of drought, the small community of Mlolo is reaping bumper harvests. With the help of funding from child sponsorship, World Vision has worked with the community to introduce a three-step drought-proofing plan.

### Step 1: Irrigate

Families use foot-powered treadle pumps to tap existing water supplies and can now irrigate large areas of land. This means winter crops like vegetables, cocoa and maize can be grown during the dry season. The results are fantastic. Fertile plots now produce one tonne of food per 1,000 square metres.

*Photo: Jerry Galea*



### Step 2: Introduce better crop varieties

New fast-maturing crops such as sorghum (pictured), millet, beans, rice and groundnuts have been introduced. Irish potatoes provide a vital back up if other crops fail.

*Photo: Jon Warren*



### Step 3: Protect the environment

Instead of using costly chemical fertilizers, farmers have learned how to use mulch. Large plantations of multi-purpose trees have been planted to provide a renewable source of firewood.

All these efforts mean food is grown to ensure that families in need, including orphans and those weakened by HIV/AIDS, can be helped. Any surplus food is sold at the market to provide cash for other essentials.

The people of Mlolo are now able to grow enough crops to eat and sell, while protecting the environment. The community is proud of its achievements.



*Photo: Jon Warren*

# Responding to environmental problems

## A rural community in Cambodia

Every year in the rainy season the water from the Kompong Tralach stream floods into the Beong Chan Kiek Lake in Kralagan village. For centuries the community has ploughed and cultivated floating rice, waiting for water to come and fill the fields.

However, when there is too much water the floating rice is spoilt. Too many bad years have left many of these farmers very poor. They have begun to lose interest in growing rice, afraid of their work going to waste. Some farmers have been forced to abandon their land to start new businesses, becoming taxi drivers or firewood cutters. Others are forced to beg or are unemployed.

Choup Gnor Gnim lives with his wife and three children in the village. While his name means 'meet and smile', the poor yields of rice per year made him an unhappy man. He was forced to do a number of secondary jobs, working long hours for little pay.



Photo: Kith Veasna

Then World Vision started working in his community. Through the provision of agricultural equipment and training, rice seeds, dam construction and fertiliser loans, the Kralagan community is becoming self-sufficient. Improved agricultural methods are producing enough rice to feed everyone, and a surplus to sell.

Choup Gnor Gnim's life has improved dramatically. As he sits on his huge hill of yellow rice, he smiles and says, "Now we are rich. The yellow rice hill is our life. Last year we had 2,000 kilograms of rice left over. Our living conditions have improved by 50 per cent."

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Topic sheet by World Vision Australia. Adapted for World Vision New Zealand by Barbara Ruck, January 2006. [infocentre@worldvision.org.nz](mailto:infocentre@worldvision.org.nz)

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