

## EXPLORING

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## PART ONE: Human Impact on the Environment

Join us as we visit Asia and explore the human impact on the environment. This five-part series runs Wednesdays through May 12.

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The impact of humans on the environment can be examined through two different lenses: how humans have adapted to and altered their environment, and the results of those changes. As you read the articles and look at the maps and photos in this series, consider how our world has changed in the last 200 years. Think about the increase in population, and the changes in where and how people live and the types of dwellings we build – from apartments and houses to teepees, yurts, huts and igloos.

Think about the way we travel – be it on foot, or by horse, bicycle, boat, airplane, scooter, car, cyclo, horse drawn buggy, water buffalo, trains, buses or mule. Consider changes in the foods we consume – from home grown food from our gardens and farms to food trucked in from distant lands, food prepared by hand and from scratch in our own kitchens, or purchased frozen at Safeway, eaten at McDonalds and Pizza Hut, or picked up at an outdoor open air market. And also think about how we dispose of our garbage and refuse: recycled, burned, buried in a landfill, composted, left out in huge trash heaps or carted around the seas on barges.



Fishing boats in Indonesia. (Photo: Celia Lowe)

### Impact on the Environment

All of these developments and adaptations alter our environment. In this series we will explore how changes initiated by humankind impact our environment and affect the day-to-day life of people. You will encounter Central Asian fishermen facing a vanishing sea and with it a disappearing livelihood, children from India working as ragpickers, environmentalists fighting to preserve the "Coral Triangle," local governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) advocating for policy changes to combat water and soil pollution, or providing educational and vocational training to poorly paid laborers.

Environmental changes may be monumental or small. Sometimes the impact is immediate, but often it is not felt for generations. For example, lumberjacks cut down trees to build settlements or to create arable land for farming and cattle grazing. But widespread deforestation can lead to

changes in weather patterns, increased sand and soil erosion, and a build up of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide. With the destruction of forests can come a loss of bio-diversity as animals and plants lose their homes and habitats.

### Making the Right Choices

What we choose to eat and how we move from place to place impacts the environment. For example, a diet full of red meat and poultry has a greater environmental impact than a primarily plant-based vegetarian diet. The lower you eat on the food chain, the fewer resources you claim. Likewise, reducing our dependence on cars results in decreased energy use, lowers carbon emissions and limits our consumption of materials used to build that car. So riding a bike is not only healthier for your body, it is better for the environment as well.

Damage to our environment can be intentional or unintentional;

sometimes it is the result of an accident (such as an oil spill), or it may be due to a thoughtless use of scarce resources or the ripple effect of development and consumption on human health and nature. Swimmers and snorkelers walking on coral reefs may damage the delicate reef, while driving cars on beaches compresses sand, making it more difficult for invertebrate species to burrow, and increasing the risk of erosion.

Our planet is now home to over 6 billion people, almost 3 billion of which live in growing urban areas. On our increasingly crowded planet, conserving and sharing our resources could be a good start to promoting environmental sustainability and lessening the adverse impact of humans on our planet.

### Comprehension questions:

- 1) What are some examples of developments or adaptations that alter the environment, and what are their results?
- 2) How does deforestation affect the environment?
- 3) What are some examples of intentional and unintentional actions that damage the environment around the world?
- 4) What are some actions you could take to improve the environment?

### Next week:

**Indonesia Set to  
Become Global  
Environmental Leader**



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The teacher's guide for this series can be found in the featured content section of the NIE Web site, [seattletimes.com/nie](http://seattletimes.com/nie).

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