Development Geography 2.3

Glossary of selected terms

cash cropping the growing of crops that, when harvested, are sold to make a quick return in the form of money. (This contrasts with crops grown primarily for the use of the growers and their families.)

cottage industry a system of employment in which rural labourers or craftspeople, with the help of their families, work at home to produce goods for sale.

development a process of change that involves an improvement in the quality of life as perceived by the people undergoing change. It is usually focused on reducing poverty. The nature of development will vary, depending on the context in which it is occurring.

ecologically sustainable development processes of development or change that benefit local peoples but do not interfere with the balance in interrelationships between organisms and their environment, which is essential for the survival of both. They are processes that are able to continue indefinitely.

export-oriented growth the expansion of industrial or agricultural activities that aim to produce goods for sale abroad as a means of generating national income.

gross domestic product (GDP) per capita the total market value of goods and services produced in an economy over a year, divided by the total population of a country.

gross national product (GNP) per capita GDP, together with income earned from investments and other earnings overseas, but not including income earned in the country by foreigners, divided by the country's population.

informal sector the part of a national economy that is involved in providing productive labour or service without formal systems of control and payment, and which usually operates without official recognition.

infrastructure the installations that provide the framework for an economy and which facilitate industrial, agricultural and urban activities, such as transport, communications and public utilities.

labour-intensive an activity or industry that requires a comparatively large workforce, while usually not needing a large capital investment.

monoculture commercial agriculture in which farms or areas produce a single crop or type of livestock, year after year.

multicropping the use of an area of land to grow a variety of, usually many, crops.

poverty the inability to meet the basic needs for food, clothing and shelter. The absence of money, goods or the means of subsistence.

qualitative indicator a quality that can be used as a basis for comparison between places or things, and which is not easily measured or quantified, such as freedom and happiness.

quantitative indicators a numerical measure of something that can be counted or quantified and which can then be used as a basis for comparison between places or things, such as income and life expectancy.

rural–urban migration the movement of people from rural areas to urban areas.

self-sufficient the situation whereby a community or country can meet all of its own needs. It is sometimes referred to as 'economic independence'.

squatter settlements unplanned, slum-like settlements dominated by makeshift dwellings built of scrap timber, iron and even cardboard. They often develop on the outskirts of a city.

subsistence agriculture an agricultural system in which products are produced for consumption by the farmer's household rather than for sale.

trickle-down effect the theory that economic growth will ultimately benefit all. According to this theory, investments in industrialisation and economic growth will generate income, the benefits of which will eventually trickle down to the poor.

Introduction

You only have to watch the nightly news on television to realise that there are enormous variations in the quality of life experienced by people living in different parts of the world. In accounting for these differences, commentators often refer to a country as being either 'developed' or 'developing'.

a A family of street-dwellers, Calcutta, India.

b An affluent family in a developed country.

Figure 2.3.1 Levels of economic and social well-being vary tremendously between countries and within countries.

In this chapter you will explore the nature of the tremendous spatial variations in the living standards of people throughout the world. (See figure 2.3.1.) You will also examine a range of ideas about what **'development'** is and about how spatial variations in development are measured. This chapter also explores reasons for spatial variations in quality of life, focusing on the interrelated nature of the forces—economic, social, cultural, political, technological and biophysical—that contribute to different types and rates of development in different countries, regions or localities. Further, the differential impacts of development on people and their environment will be explored at these different **geographical scales**.

What is development?

The term 'development' is often used to suggest a condition that is seen to be desirable for countries where large numbers of the population live in comparative **poverty**. These people do not have access to basic necessities; quite apart from the consumer luxuries enjoyed by people living in developed countries.

Any discussion about development tends to generate considerable debate. There are many different views about what development is. Indeed, there are over 700 definitions of development used in books written on the subject. It is still common today to hear the view that economic growth and industrialisation are the keys to successful 'development'. Other definitions of development emphasise the role the local community should play in planning for and bringing about change and the importance of generating changes that can continue without harming other people, communities or the environment.

Development is sometimes thought of as a *process*, but there are differing opinions on what the *outcomes* of development should be. For decades, it was assumed that for poor countries to be 'developed' meant that it was necessary for them to follow the path of the wealthy countries—modernisation, industrialisation and the attainment of high material standards of living. Many people would still make this assumption. However, many 'traditional' societies, while lacking the trappings of modernisation and consumerism, have lifestyles and values which those living in the developed world would do well to emulate. While all definitions of development imply that the change process should be beneficial for countries or people engaged in development, opinion is divided about what the outcomes of change should be.

Traditional values of many developing societies, such as strong family and community ties, sharing and cooperation, and living in harmony with the environment, are of worth for all societies. Similarly, the assumption that industrialisation and modernisation are a more advanced state than traditional ways of life based on **subsistence agriculture** or traditional subsistence economies based on hunting and gathering, ignores the disadvantages of industrial growth, such as pollution, traffic congestion, social disharmony and stress. So, development has different meanings for different people, depending on what attributes of 'the good life' they value. Thus, the meaning of development is context specific—it varies from place to place and depends on the interests, culture and values of those who define it.

Another way of approaching a discussion about what development means is to ask what development is not. There is widespread agreement that extreme poverty is not development. Poverty 'means that opportunities and choices most basic to human development are denied—to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-respect and respect of others'. (UNDP, *Human Development*

ACTIVITY

Think about the topic of this chapter: development geography. What do you think the term 'development' means when used in reference to countries? To assist you to think about the issues involved, answer the following questions:

- **a** If the term 'development' is applied to countries, what does it mean? Try to write your own definition of what development of a country means.
- **b** If the term 'development' implies positive change, or advancement to some sort of higher state, what changes do you think are positive for the people of the world's poorer countries?
- **c** Of the changes you have suggested, would any be of benefit to all countries, including Australia?

DEFINING DEVELOPMENT

Development is the process by which the political, social and, especially, economic structures of a country are improved for the purpose of ensuring the well-being of its populace.

J. Fisher, *Geography and Development: A World Regional Approach*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1995, p. 17

Development: A comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of the benefits resulting therefrom.

AusAID, *NGO Package of Information*, Canberra, 1997, p. 14

Any adequate definition of development includes six dimensions:

1. an *economic component* dealing with the creation of wealth and improved conditions of material life, equitably distributed
2. a *social ingredient* measured as well-being in health, education, housing and employment
3. a *political dimension* embracing such values as human rights, political freedom, legal enfranchisement of persons, and some form of democracy
4. a *cultural element* in recognition of the fact that cultures confer identity and self-worth to people
5. *ecological soundness*
6. a final dimension one may call the *full-life paradigm*, which refers to meaning systems, symbols and beliefs concerning the ultimate meaning of life and history.

D. Goulet, in T. Tryzna (ed.), *A Sustainable World*, Earthscan, London, 1995, p. 51

ACTIVITY

Working in groups, compare these definitions of development and discuss the following questions:

- **a** What different *outcomes* of development are described?
- **b** What different *processes* of development are described?
- **c** What causes these different understandings about development?

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Human development is the process of enlarging people's choices—not just choices among different detergents, television channels or car models but the choices that are created by expanding human capabilities and functionings—what people do and can do in their lives. At all levels of development a few capabilities are essential for human development, without which many choices in life would not be available. These capabilities are to lead long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable and to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living … But many additional choices are valued by people. These include political, social, economic and cultural freedom, a sense of community, opportunities for being creative and productive, and self-respect and human rights. Yet human development is more than just achieving these capabilities; it is also the process of pursuing them in a way that is equitable, participatory, productive and sustainable …

Getting income is one of the options people would like to have. It is important but not an all-important option. Human development includes the expansion of income and wealth, but it includes many other valued and valuable things as well …

More income is only one of the things poor people desire. Adequate nutrition, safe water at hand, better medical services, more and better schooling for their children, cheap transport, adequate shelter, continuing employment and secure livelihoods and productive, remunerating, satisfying jobs do not show up in higher income per head, at least not for some time.

There are other non-material benefits that are often more highly valued by poor people than material improvements … Among these are good and safe working conditions, freedom to choose jobs and livelihoods, freedom of movement and speech, liberation from oppression, violence and exploitation, security from persecution and arbitrary arrest, a satisfying family life, the assertion of cultural and religious values, adequate leisure time and satisfying forms of its use, a sense of purpose in life and work, the opportunity to join and actively participate in the activities of civil society and a sense of belonging to a community. These are often more highly valued than income, both in their own right and as a means to satisfying and productive work.

Paul Streeten in UNDP, *Human Development Report 1999*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1999, pp. 16–17

ACTIVITY

Explain the concept of human development.

Figure 2.3.2 Absolute poverty means that people lack the basic necessities of life.

Report 1997, p. 15) If people are living in poverty, or are unable to attain the basic necessities of life, then their community or society can be regarded as 'underdeveloped'. So it is logical to say that any discussion of the meaning of development should focus on the elimination of absolute poverty.

Therefore, although difficult to define, 'development' has several essential elements:

- It is a *process* that involves *change* resulting in improvements (as perceived by the people experiencing change).
- The focus of any change or advancement should involve the *reduction of absolute poverty*.
- The nature of the change will vary, depending on the *context* of the development process. Specifically, the values and priorities of the community, region or country undergoing change should determine the nature of change.

Today, many would argue that another essential element of development should be that it is **ecologically sustainable**—that it should not impact on the biophysical environment in a way that will prevent the process from continuing into the future.

TERMINOLOGY: GETTING IT RIGHT

Absolute versus relative poverty

Absolute poverty refers to some absolute standard of minimum requirement (see figure 2.3.2), while **relative poverty** refers to falling behind others in the community. With respect to income, a person is absolutely poor if his or her income is less than the defined income poverty line, while a person is relatively poor if he or she belongs to a bottom income group, such as the poorest 10%.

UNDP, *Human Development Report 1997*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997, p. 13

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1 Why is it difficult to define the term 'development'?
2 What should be the essential components of any definition of development?
3 Why is the meaning of development said to be value specific?
4 Distinguish between a nation's economic development and human development.
5 Define poverty. Distinguish between absolute and relative poverty.

ACTIVITIES

1 Definitions of development usually fall into one of two broad categories: those that emphasise economic growth and those that emphasise social well-being. Write an example of each.
2 Write a one-page extended response to the following topic: 'There is no consensus about what development means or requires.'
3 Study figure 2.3.3. Explain in your own words the message the cartoonist is seeking to convey.

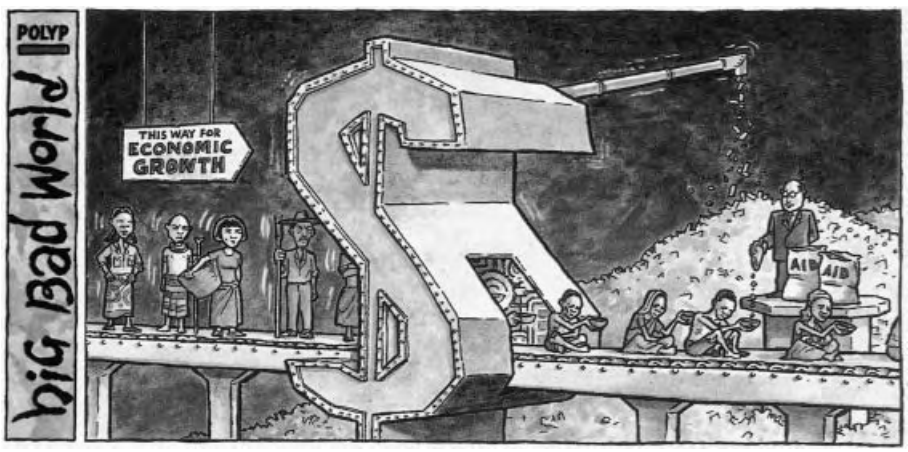

Figure 2.3.3
Source: *New Internationalist*, July 1999

Spatial variations in development

Development terminology: Is there a 'Third World'?

Just as it is difficult to define the term 'development', so is it difficult to decide what collective term to use when describing the world's poorer countries. The term **'Third World'** is frequently used. It emerged in the 1950s in France as a political term. The Western capitalist countries became known as the **'First World'**, while the socialist countries, primarily in Eastern Europe, were known as the **'Second World'**. The Third World was

the term given to the newly independent, unaligned and usually poor countries. It also became common to hear of a **'Fourth World'**, which referred to the poorest countries that had been singled out by the United Nations (UN) as 'least developed' and deserving of special assistance. The term Fourth World is also often used today to refer to poor groups of people within wealthy countries.

The process of democratisation among former socialist countries means that 'Second World' is no longer a useful political term, while rapid economic growth in East Asian economies blurred the border between rich and poor countries. These changes, and the formation of new political alignments among poor countries, largely invalidate the original political intention of the terminology 'First', 'Second' and 'Third' worlds. Yet the term 'Third World' is still commonly used to refer to the world's poorer countries.

The terms **'North'** and **'South'** became popular in the 1980s and are still often used. However, the globe cannot be neatly divided into the 'rich North' and the 'poor South'. Australia is probably one of the most obvious examples (to Australians anyway!) of a country that does not fit neatly into this classification system. Other terms have also been popular. For example the terms 'developed' and **'underdeveloped'** or **'undeveloped'** have also been used widely in an attempt to identify a collective term for the rich and poor countries. The other terms in common use have all been condemned by peoples of the poor countries as Eurocentric terms that imply that lack of affluence means a country is underdeveloped in all senses. This is offensive to peoples whose cultural, spiritual and social systems have much of value. The implication of such terminology is that material things alone determine states of development. Values of harmony, cooperation, sharing and peace may be more important to a community than material possessions. Similarly, the terms **'industrialised'** and **'modernised'** attract criticism for the implication that poor countries have no industrial activity at all, are 'backward' or that non-Western traditions are not a positive attribute.

In attempting to lessen the offensiveness of some of this terminology to people of the world's poor countries, the label **'developing countries'** has frequently been used. Very recently, the terms **'two-thirds world'** or **'majority world'** have been adopted by some aid agency staff and development experts. The poor world occupies at least two-thirds of the global land mass and contains even more of its population. These terms recognise these facts, without carrying any suggestion of value judgments. While these terms seem to be the least value laden, they are still not commonly used and understood. So, for the purposes of this book, the term **'developing countries'** will be used to collectively describe the world's poorer countries.

Measuring development

Geographers are interested in the patterns of spatial distribution of levels of development throughout the world and in the reasons for these. Development is a relative term—the extent to which a country is developed can only be determined if you compare that country to others. Various methods have been used to measure the development of countries and to enable such comparisons to be made.

Quantitative indicators are the most commonly used means of comparison. A **quantitative indicator** is simply a numerical measure of something that can be counted or quantified. These data are then used as a basis for comparison between countries. A variety of quantitative indicators are used to measure development, with gross national product (GNP) per capita being the most frequently used measure of a country's state of development. Figure 2.3.4 (page 240) maps countries according to their level of income, that is their

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1960 the 20% of the world's people who lived in the richest countries had 30 times the income of the poorest 20%; by 1995 it was 82 times. The world's 225 richest people have a combined wealth of over $US1 million million. Only 4% of this wealth—$US40 billion—would be enough for basic education and health care, adequate food and safe water and sanitation for all the world's people.

New Internationalist, No. 310, March 1999, p. 18

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. Write a brief statement outlining some of the difficulties associated with the use of the terms 'North' and 'South' to describe the division between the rich world and the poor world.
2. Think about the use of the terms 'underdeveloped' or 'undeveloped' to collectively describe poor countries. Do you think these terms are appropriate? How do you think you would feel about their use if you were a resident of one of the world's poor countries?
3. The terms 'modernised' or 'industrialised' are often used to describe the wealthier countries, while the words 'traditional' or 'non-industrial' are employed as descriptors for the poor countries. Do you think this is appropriate terminology? Give reasons for your answers.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Life expectancy for indigenous Australians is 57 years for males and 62 years for females; nearly 20 years less than for the total Australian population.
- In 1997, 18.4% of the occupants of Australian gaols were indigenous Australians, yet indigenous Australians comprised only 2% of the total Australian population.*
- In 1996, 12% of indigenous Australians were in full-time tertiary education; one-third the rate of total Australians.
- Of indigenous workforce participants, 22.7% were unemployed in 1996; more than double the unemployment rate for the total population (9.2%).
- The median personal income of indigenous Australians was $190 per week in 1996; 65.1% of the median income of all Australians ($292).

Australian Bureau of Statistics, *1999 Year Book Australia CD*, Canberra

*Australian Bureau of Statistics, *1998 Year Book Australia*, Canberra

Table 2.3.1 Similar human development index (HDI), different income, 1997

Country	*HDI value*	*Real GDP per capita (PPP*$)*
Spain	0.894	15 930
Singapore	0.888	28 460
Georgia	0.729	1 960
Turkey	0.728	6 350
Morocco	0.582	3 310
Lesotho	0.582	1 860

*Purchasing power parity
Source: Human Development Report Office

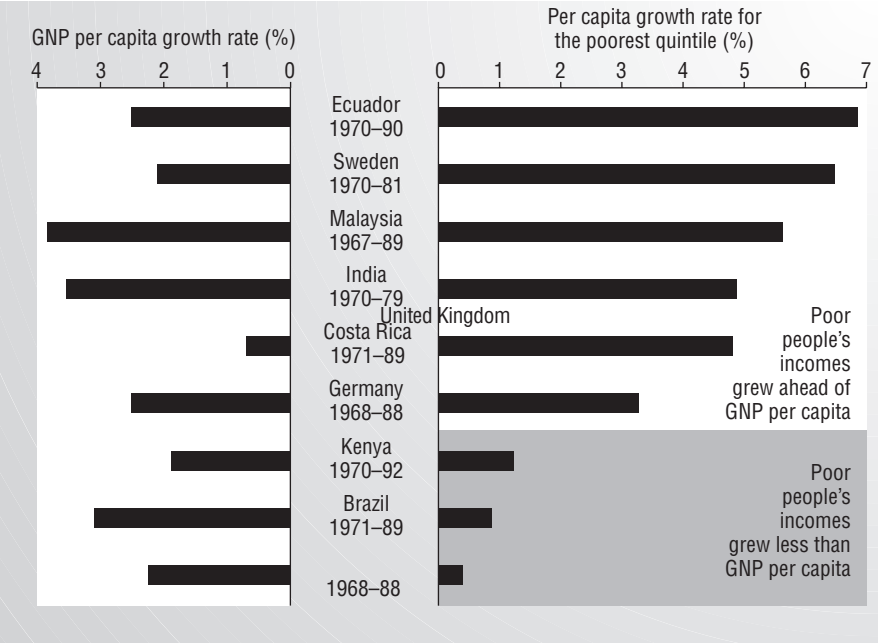

Figure 2.3.7 Growth: pro-poor or pro-rich?

Photographic Interpretation: Housing as a measure of development

Figure 2.3.8a

Figure 2.3.8b

Figure 2.3.8c

ACTIVITY

Study the photographs in figure 2.3.8 and then complete the following tasks:

a Which photograph do you think is from the poorest country? Give reasons for your answer. Can you suggest which country this home is from?

b Which home belongs to people with the highest standard of living? Why do you think this? Can you suggest which country this home belongs to?

c What does this activity tell us about the nature of development? Why must we be careful when we use statistical data that seek to profile an entire population?

The UN Development Program (UNDP) has generated what it calls the human development index (HDI) as a measure of development. The HDI is a composite statistical measure that includes life expectancy at birth, educational attainment and income. Unlike GNP per capita, the HDI is not solely focused on economic wealth. It aims to incorporate the basic factors necessary for people to be able to participate in, and to contribute meaningfully to, society.

Figure 2.3.7 and table 2.3.1 (page 241) show that, even when countries have similar levels of income, their levels of human development may be quite different. Equally, high levels of economic growth are not necessarily translated into an improvement in the income levels of the poor. In other words, there are high levels of inequality in some countries that have high levels of economic growth. As a further illustration, complete the following photographic study.

Figure 2.3.8a is a home in Bali, Indonesia. It is the family home of a religious leader. Figure 2.3.8b is the home of a farming family in Laos. You may be surprised to discover that figure 2.3.8c is of the home of an Australian family—living in a remote Aboriginal community near Yuendamu, in Central Australia. Viewing these photographs shows that it is difficult to generalise about wealthy and poor countries. There are people living within the so-called 'developed world' with standards of living, literacy, health and life expectancy similar to those in the poor world. Likewise, as the photo of the home in Bali illustrates, there are residents of what we think of as poorer countries who enjoy a high material standard of living.

Although quantitative indicators are useful as a starting point for making comparisons between countries, they mask inequalities at a different scale. The concern of geographers is not only with differences *between* countries, but with **spatial differences** in the levels of development *within* countries. In attempting to answer the question 'Where is the Third World?', using quantitative measures can ignore the complexity and diversity within countries.

Additionally, dependence on quantitative indicators of development means that other aspects of development may be ignored. Earlier in this chapter you thought about which values would be positive attributes of a 'developed' society. Values such as peace, harmony, cooperation and joy are important contributors to quality of life. Yet, how can they be measured? It is not as simple to gauge 'national harmony' or 'levels of joy in a country's population' as to count dollars or determine death rates! Similarly, it is difficult to measure levels of human rights, individual freedoms and the status of indigenous people, all of which are today generally regarded as important components of human development.

Factors such as traffic congestion, social disharmony, pollution and stress also affect quality of life, yet are rarely used as a basis for comparing the levels of development of countries. If **qualitative indicators**, such as social harmony and low stress levels, were used as a basis for comparison between countries or regions, the boundaries drawn between what are regarded as developed or less developed countries may well be very different from those based on quantitative indicators such as per capita incomes.

You should now understand some of the difficulties involved in attempting to define the term 'development' and in attempting to delimit the poor world. There is a danger in ready acceptance of generalisations and assumptions that may limit our understanding of the world's complexity and diversity. Despite this warning, there are some general characteristics that give a measure of unity to much of the poor world. The next part of this chapter will explore some of these characteristics and describe forces that have contributed to different levels of development throughout the world.

USING THE INTERNET

Listed below are some Internet sites that students will find useful when studying development geography. The first site contains copies of most of the *New Internationalist* magazines. The Oneworld site provides lots of information about current affairs in different countries. The next two sites, from AusAID and ACFOA, provide details about Australia's official and non-government aid, as well as press releases and information about current issues in different developing countries. The rest of the sites are good sources of development data.

- *New Internationalist* (http://www.oneworld.org/ni/)
- Oneworld (http://www.oneworld.net/)
- AusAID (http://www.ausaid.gov.au)
- ACFOA (http://www.acfoa.asn.au/)
- World Bank (http://www.worldbank.org/)
- World Resources Institute (http://www.nri.org)
- UN Development Program (http://www.undp.org)
- US Census Bureau (http://www.census.gov/ipc/www)

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. Explain the difference between quantitative and qualitative indicators of development.
2. List the advantages and disadvantages of using quantitative measures of development.
3. What are some of the limitations of using qualitative indicators of development?
4. Explain some of the problems inherent in attempting to decide on a precise boundary for the developing world and the developed world.
5. What is the human development index? What indicators of development does it include?

ACTIVITIES

1 Study figure 2.3.4 carefully. On the basis of this map, list five countries you would regard as developed and five countries you would regard as poor. Justify your selection.

2 Write a short statement explaining why measures of economic performance are preferred as a means of measuring development.

3 Write a short statement explaining the shortcomings of using only an economic measure, such as GNP per capita, as a basis for ranking countries on a scale of development.

4 Study figures 2.3.5 and 2.3.6, which show life expectancy and telephone mainlines, and then complete the following tasks:
- **a** If you were to use the maps in figures 2.3.5 and 2.3.6 as a basis for determining the boundaries of the poor world, is it clear where that boundary should be?
- **b** Quantitative measures can be used to rank countries according to their level of development. When different quantitative indicators are compared, some countries do not always fit neatly into the same category. Use an atlas map to name some of these countries.

5 Study figure 2.3.7. This figure graphically illustrates the relationship between growth in GNP per capita and growth in incomes of the poorest people in some countries. How would you describe this relationship?

6 Study table 2.3.1. Write a brief report describing the relationship between incomes and levels of human development illustrated by the table.

7 Undertake a class discussion. The World Bank described poverty as 'the inability to attain a minimal standard of living'. What do you think a 'minimal standard of living' should be? Is it possible to define a minimal standard of living that is appropriate for all people in all societies?

8 Borrow the video *The Gods Must Be Crazy I* and watch the first 20 minutes of the video at home. Then answer the following questions:
- **a** What are the 'benefits' of being part of 'civilisation'?
- **b** What attributes of the hunter–gatherer society do you regard as 'civilised'?
- **c** The intrusion of one object from 'civilisation'—a Coca-Cola bottle—had profound impacts on the community in the Kalahari. What were they?
- **d** How do you think you can best measure which societies are 'developed' and which are not?

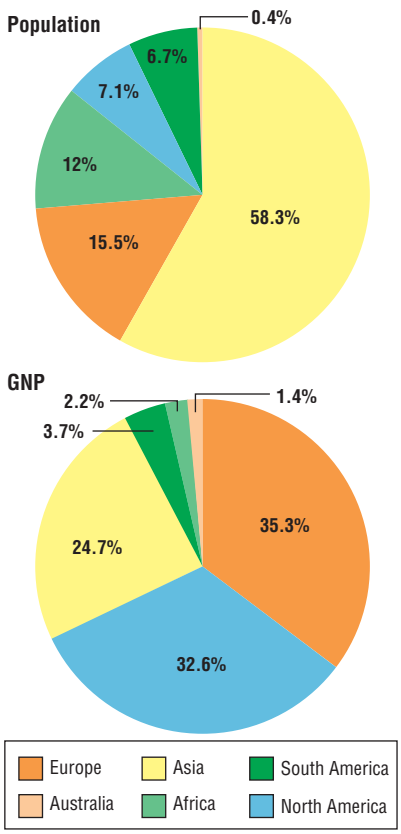

Figure 2.3.9 The shares of population and wealth (GNP) by continent show the extent of global inequalities.

Development issues

Common characteristics of poor countries

While there is tremendous diversity between and within all countries, there are a number of issues that more commonly confront developing countries than the wealthier developed countries. The following sample study of Ban Nong Pene Village in Laos will introduce you to some of these issues.

The major distinctive characteristics of poor countries are listed below. You have identified some of these in the activities above. Note that many correspond to the quantitative indicators (discussed on page 243) that are frequently used to measure development.

- **Low per capita income.** In general, developing countries tend to have low levels of per capita income. By the late 1990s, 86% of world GDP was shared by the one-fifth of the world's people living in the highest income countries. The bottom fifth shared just 1% of world GDP. (See figure 2.3.9 and table 2.3.2, page 246.)
- **Poverty and indebtedness.** Nearly 1.3 billion people live on less than $US1 a day. More than one-quarter of the 4.5 billion people in developing countries still do not have access to basic education and services and are unlikely to survive beyond age 40. Developing countries also tend to be heavily indebted. The external debt of developing countries (almost $2.2 trillion in 1997) drains public budgets and uses the resources needed for human development.
- **Poor health and low access to health services.** Availability of health services is generally low in developing countries. For example in the period 1990–93, Niger had one doctor for over 54 000 people and Nepal had one doctor for over 13 600 people. In the same period, Austria had one doctor to 231 people, while New Zealand had one doctor per 518 people.

SAMPLE STUDY

Ban Nong Pene Village, Laos

Nang Noi starts the fire and grills some fish, working slowly but steadily as she squats on her kitchen floor. There are plenty of fish in the nearby pond in the forest, but vegetables are scarce this late in the dry season …

Last year Nang Noi's husband died of liver disease. She admits she is worried about how she is going to raise her children … A quiet, introverted woman, who reveals nothing but a sad smile, Nang Noi is familiar with death. Of the 13 children she carried, two were born dead and three died from fever, probably malaria—the foremost cause of child mortality in Laos. Since her last stillbirth, Nang Noi has not felt well but doesn't know who to turn to. In rural areas especially, medicine is lacking and trained nurses and doctors are scarce …

Nang Noi, who does not know how to read and write, counts on her children's education and hopes that they will not be among the many who drop out after primary school. 'I am old now,' she says, 'and I hope that soon my children will be taking care of me.' …

Nang Noi is from the t'ai Dam tribe, one of the many minority groups that live in Laos' mountainous north. She came south into the lowlands when she was 10 years old to live with an aunt because her own family could not afford to feed her …

Largely forested and sparsely populated, Laos is extremely underdeveloped and most of its limited resources are underexploited. The internal transportation system is inadequate and the government is encouraging more and more mountain people to come to live in the fertile Mekong Valley, where 8% of the country's agricultural land is located and where government facilities are more accessible …

The rice fields Nang Noi and her children once worked never produced enough rice for their consumption. Luckily, the Ban Nong Pene Village district, not far from the capital and accessible by road, has been used for pilot agricultural projects.

Since 1983, Australian foreign aid has sponsored the production of a wild grass whose seeds may be used as fertiliser. It grows early in the dry sandy earth and Nang Noi's family can process it using the same methods as rice. With the profit, they buy rice instead of growing it. Nang Noi also raises chickens, pigs and green vegetables from her garden to earn cash …

Figure 2.3.10 Location of Laos and Ban Nong Pene Village.

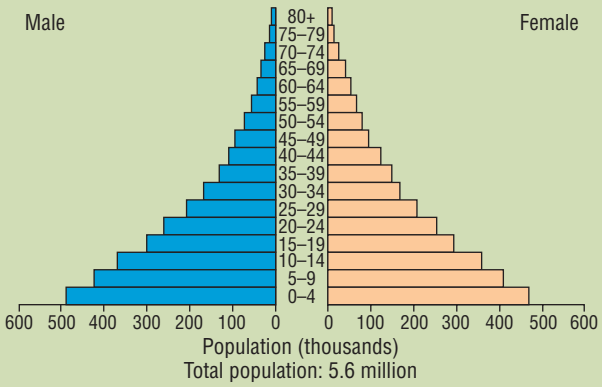

Figure 2.3.11 Population pyramid for Laos, 2000.

Geography
Laos is a landlocked country dominated by dense jungle and rugged mountains, with a vast drainage basin in the centre and alluvial plains in the west along the Mekong River. Maximum altitude: 2820 m (Phou Bia).
Area: 231 795 km2
Density: 20 people/km² (1993)
Arable land: 4% (1989–90)
Forest: 56% (1989–90)
Climate: sub-equatorial, monsoonal, with a wet season from May to October and a dry season from November to April. High humidity for most of the year.
Capital: Vientiane, population 700 000 (1991)

The Laotians
Language
Lao Lum (official); spoken by about half the population. The various ethnic groups speak many other languages.
Religion
A large majority practice Theravada Buddhism. Animism is common among the mountain tribes.
Population
Total: 5.6 million (1999)
Annual growth: 2.7 (1999)
Urban: 21.8% (1997); 32.7% is the estimate for 2015
Rural: 78.2%
Projected population: 8.9 million in 2020; 13.8 million in 2050
Population structure (See figure 2.3.11.)
Ethnic groups
Estimated 68 ethnic groups, divided into three main groups:
- Lao Lum (lowland Lao): about half the population
- Lao Sung (highland Lao): about one-third of the population
- Lao Theung (high-plateau Lao): the rest of the population

Social indicators
Life expectancy: 54.2 years (1999)
Infant mortality: 89/1000 live births (1999)
Birth rate per 1000 population: 40 (1999)
Death rate per 1000 population: 13 (1999)
Fertility rate (per woman): 5.5 (1999)

Health
Access to health service: 67% (1981–92)
Maternal mortality: 300/100 000 live births (1991)
Population per physician: 1360 (1984–89)
Housing
Electricity: 103 kilowatt hours per capita (1996); it can be assumed the rural majority is still without
Access to safe water: 44% (1990–97)
Access to sanitation facilities: 18% (1990–97)
Construction materials: no data, yet known to be bamboo and bush materials
Education
Literacy: 58.6% (male: 71.15; female: 46.8%) (1997)
Gross enrolment ratio: 55% (1997)
Economic activity
Agriculture: 52% of GDP (1997)
Industry: 21% of GDP (1997)
Services: 26% of GDP (1997)
GNP per capita: $US4415 (1997)
National currency: kip
Principal resources: rice and tin
External debt as a percentage of GNP: 132.4 (1997)

H. Tremblay, *Families of the World*, 1994, p. 85; UNDP, *Human Development Report 1999*

Hanging from a seesaw-like contraption is a large wooden pole. Nang Tia and her twin sisters stand barefoot on one end of the thresher to bring the heavy pole up above the grain, then they step off, allowing it to drop. With each vibrating thud, the pole separates the grains from the stalk. After it rises, Nang Noi takes the grass and shakes the seeds free. She and her daughters work steadily for two hours. When the sun becomes unbearable, they rest under the house and then begin again.

Nang Noi's daughters start making the trips to the well. They take turns carrying the water in two small, tightly woven baskets slung from a pole which balances easily on their shoulders. Her day's work finished, Nang Noi goes to the well in her bathing sarong to rinse off the dust of threshing. There was a time when she could use her own well, but many seasons of drought have dried it up. There is now only one well left for the whole village.

H. Tremblay, *Families of the World*, 1994, pp. 81–5

Figure 2.3.12 Nang Noi's family. From left to right: Thao Choy (aged 16), Nang Tia, (15), Nang La (12), Nang Noi (48), Nang Hieng (12), Thao Bounlot (13), Nang Xeune (9), Thao Bang (6), Thao Ky (17).

ACTIVITIES

1 List the ways in which the lifestyle of Nang Noi's family differs from that of your own family.

2 Think about agricultural practices in Australia. Using the sample study, outline obvious differences between rural life in Laos and in Australia.

3 From the sample study, including the statistics, can you list any features of life in Laos that could be regarded as 'symptoms of underdevelopment'?

4 Explain how levels of development in Laos impact on the quality of life of Nang Noi's family.

5 Conduct research into the history of Laos. What historical factors do you think may account for some of its present-day problems?

6 Study figure 2.3.11 and then complete the following tasks:
- **a** Estimate the population of Laos under the age of 15 years.
- **b** Calculate the proportion of Laos' population under the age of 15 years.
- **c** Explain why Laos' population will continue to grow for the foreseeable future.

Figure 2.3.13 Low levels of education slow the rate of development in many developing countries.

Table 2.3.2 The wealth gap. The world's richest and poorest countries, by gross national product per capita in $US, 1997

Richest countries	*GNP per capita ($US)*	*Poorest countries*	*GNP per capita ($US)*
1 Luxembourg	45 360	1 Mozambique	90
2 Switzerland	44 220	2 Ethiopia	110
3 Japan	37 850	3 Congo (D. Rep.)	110
4 Norway	36 090	4 Burundi	180
5 Liechtenstein	33 000	5 Sierra Leone	200
6 Singapore	32 940	6 Niger	200
7 Denmark	32 500	7 Rwanda	210
8 Bermuda	31 870	8 Tanzania	210
9 United States	28 740	9 Nepal	210
10 Germany	28 260	10 Malawi	220
11 Austria	27 980	11 Chad	240
12 Iceland	26 580	12 Madagascar	250
13 Belgium	26 420	13 Mali	260
14 Sweden	26 220	14 Yemen	270
15 France	26 050	15 Cambodia	300
16 Netherlands	25 820	16 Bosnia-Herzegovina	300
17 Monaco	25 000	17 Gambia, The	320
18 Hong Kong	22 990	18 Haiti	330
19 Finland	20 580	19 Kenya	330
20 United Kingdom	18 700	20 Angola	340

Source: UN