

Another problem in India is the lack of a system for sharing water rights across state lines. This means that it's not clear who gets how much of a given river's water. India is facing water shortages severe enough to lead to conflict.

And finally, India lacks sanitation. The country has a blossoming middle class. But three-quarters of the population lack access to toilets. Many cities and towns simply dump untreated sewage into their rivers. The results are easy to imagine. Diseases linked to poor sanitation kill nearly 600,000 children in India every year.

The sanitation problem has another aspect: jobs. India has many low-caste workers known as scavengers. Every day, all over the country, they carry human waste away in buckets from the homes of the wealthy. Reformers want to introduce inexpensive toilets. But that would put the scavengers out of work. So reformers also want to train the scavengers for more productive careers.

### The Interactions Between Asia's Rich Cities and Its Poor Rural Areas

One of the great trends around the world is **urbanization**—the movement of population from rural areas into cities. People are leaving farms to seek work in urban areas. China, for instance, had 430 million people in its cities in 2001. Estimates are that by 2015, 850 million Chinese will live there. The number of cities themselves is increasing, too. In 2001 China had 630 cities with more than 100,000 people in each. By 2015, experts predict, it will have more than 1,000 cities that size.





















In a scene typical of a rural Chinese village, people gather in the street—even in winter—to socialize.

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The fastest "urban growth" in China now is in towns of 5,000 to 10,000 people.



## The World's Most Populous Metropolitan Areas

Rank	Metropolitan area	Country	Population
1	Tokyo	 Japan	32,450,000
2	Seoul	 South Korea	20,550,000
3	Mexico City	 Mexico	20,450,000
4	New York City	 United States	19,750,000
5	Mumbai	 India	19,200,000
6	Jakarta	 Indonesia	18,900,000
7	São Paulo	 Brazil	18,850,000
8	Delhi	 India	18,600,000
9	Osaka–Kobe–Kyoto	 Japan	17,375,000
10	Shanghai	 People's Republic of China	16,650,000
11	Metro Manila	 Philippines	16,300,000
12	Hong Kong–Shenzhen	 People's Republic of China	15,800,000
13	Los Angeles	 United States	15,250,000
14	Calcutta	 India	15,100,000
15	Moscow	 Russia	15,000,000
16	Cairo	 Egypt	14,450,000
17	Buenos Aires	 Argentina	13,170,000
18	London	 United Kingdom	12,875,000
19	Beijing	 People's Republic of China	12,500,000
20	Karachi	 Pakistan	11,800,000

Of the world's 20 most populous metropolitan areas in 2003, 12 were in Asia.

Cities offer people opportunity to do work that creates more value than they could simply working the land. They can make more money in town. That's the "pull" of cities. Meanwhile, the use of tractors and other farm machinery—along with improved seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides—means that it takes fewer farmers to feed people than it used to. That's the "push" from the countryside.

When people go to the big cities, they don't necessarily forget where they came from. The connections between the cities and the rural areas are still important. At a personal level, people keep in touch with their home villages and their relatives who still live there. The bigger picture is that the cities rely on the countryside to supply food.

## The Difficulty of Securing Basic Resources in Rural Asia

Asia has made great economic strides over the past few decades. The region has benefited from the Green Revolution, a movement to improve food yields beginning in the 1960s. Millions of people in Asia are eating better than they used to. The number of calories the average person ate every day rose 20 percent between 1970 and 1995, for instance. Between 1975 and 1995 the share of all Asians living in poverty fell from 1 in 2 to only 1 in 4. During that same period, the share of rural Asians living in poverty fell from 1 in 2 to 1 in 3.

But a report in 2001 by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) called Asia's progress an "unfinished revolution." It found that 670 million rural Asians still live in poverty. They tend to be less healthy and less educated than their counterparts in the cities. Most of these rural people rely, directly or indirectly, on farming, forestry, or fishing for their living. This puts great pressure on natural resources. Too many farmers planting too many crops may "exhaust" farmland. Too many woodcutters may chop down all the trees. Fish may disappear if too many fishermen go after them. This isn't just bad for the soil, the trees, and the fish, but for the people as well. Degradation of the natural environment may lead to social conflict, experts warn.



*A man collects water from a local pond in India.*

*Photo by Mark Sappenfield / © 2007 The Christian Science Monitor*

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Another issue is the shift to the market economy. This is one in which people work for money and use it to buy what they need. In rural areas, many people raise their own food by planting gardens and small farm plots and by tending livestock. People who don't earn much in the cash economy need this to survive. Experts don't want to see rural people give up their gardens.

### fastFACT

The Green Revolution that took place during the 1960s and '70s was a significant increase in agricultural productivity. It came about after experts brought in new high-yield grains, showed farmers how to use pesticides, and taught them better management techniques.

Water scarcity is another issue the IFPRI report touched on. It called water scarcity and quality “probably the most severe challenges facing developing Asia.” They will reach crisis levels by 2020, the report said. Demand for water is growing from agriculture, industry, and households. But the potential for expanding the water supply is diminishing. And that could spell trouble.

## Social and Economic Problems Tied to India's Caste System

In this lesson, you have read about a low-status group, the scavengers, stuck doing some very dirty work. Their plight shows how the caste system overshadows India's society and economy. A job associated with low-caste workers has hindered Indians from getting modern sanitation. The system doesn't hurt just the people at the bottom. It hurts everyone.

It is officially illegal in India to discriminate against someone based on caste. But such discrimination does take place, and it is accepted. It's prevalent, in fact, especially in the countryside. Sometimes the resistance to change results in violence.

The caste system has four major categories:

- Priests (*Brahmin*)
- Warriors (*Kshatriya*)
- Traders/artisans (*Vaishya*)
- Farmers/laborers (*Shudra*).

Tribal people and the dalits, or “untouchables,” are a fifth broad category. In addition to these, there are thousands of *jatis*. These are local groups, based on occupations. Their members intermarry. All these groups are organized in a rank order in accord with complex ideas of purity and pollution.

However, the government has worked hard to make caste status less important. In rural areas, especially, it's tried to make information, communication, transport, and credit more available. This has helped soften the harshest aspects of the caste system. The government has also introduced forms of **affirmative action**—a government policy that enforces hiring and other goals to combat discrimination—and other social policies. And in India's bustling, prosperous cities, caste becomes much less visible.



Neon signs in Chinese and English hang along a busy street in Hong Kong, China.

Photo by Melanie Stetson Freeman / © 1996 The Christian Science Monitor

Cities draw more investment than rural areas because investors like to put money into places where people are better educated.

## The Widening Gap Between Urban Wealth and Rural Poverty in Asia

As Asia's economies have boomed in recent years, gaps between rich and poor have widened sharply. The rich people tend to be in the cities, and the poor are out in the country. This is especially true in China, but also in India, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka.

According to the Asian Development Bank, the problem is that the cities draw more investment than rural areas. Investors like to put money into places where people are better educated. On the other hand, government policies often keep private investors from putting money into rural Asia, which needs so much new infrastructure.

It's not unusual for growing economies to have differences in incomes between the rich and the poor. But extreme differences are not healthy, experts say. They can weaken national unity and lead to civil unrest.

Growth in China and India's big cities has already caused problems. Economic booms have even more people moving to cities that are already overcrowded. Meanwhile, more isolated areas lack foreign investment and other opportunities. In a 2007 report, the Asian Development Bank called for efforts to provide better nutrition, education, and health care in rural Asia.