

Country profile India

World Vision

GEOGRAPHY

India, situated in southern Asia, is the seventh largest country in the world - almost twice the size of Queensland. It includes the mountainous Himalayas in the north, deserts in the north-west and alluvial plains along the Ganges River.

PEOPLE

India's population is the second biggest in the world (15% of the world's population). The most densely populated areas include the Ganges Plain and urban centres like Mumbai, Kolkatta, Chennai and the capital city, Delhi. Among the hundreds of languages spoken, 18 are recognised in the constitution. Hindi is the official national language, but English is also widely used. About 75% of Indians are Hindu, 10% are Muslim and 3% are Christian.

HISTORY

Civilisation has existed in the Indus Valley for over 5,000 years and since then successive waves of invaders have shaped Indian culture. European presence began in the early 16th century but it wasn't until the 18th century that the Europeans took power when the British East India Company began to conquer Indian territory.



Sponsorship programs are helping Nafisa's family to improve their income. Nafisa plans to keep studying and become a nurse one day.

In 1915, Mohandas K Gandhi, began work with the Indian National Congress to achieve Indian independence from British rule. This was achieved in 1947. Independence was accompanied by a rise in tension between Muslims and Hindus which led to 'Partition' where India was divided into India and Pakistan. Pakistan was later divided into Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Since 1989, India has been ruled by a series of coalition governments. Frequent changes of government have added to the challenge of preserving unity among religious, political and regional groups in the world's largest democracy.

ECONOMY

Agriculture employs about two-thirds of the workforce. India is a leading producer of rice, wheat, tea, sugar and groundnuts. It is self-sufficient in most food grains. However, yields per hectare can be low and output depends largely on rainfall. As rainfall becomes less predictable, agriculture is made more difficult.

Despite attempted reforms, 7% of landowners hold half the farmland and can afford better seeds, fertiliser and irrigation. Most farms are less than one hectare—too small to feed a family.

Over the past 20 years the combination of foreign investment and booming high technology exports has generated enormous economic growth. This has been led by software and communications industries.

However, this wealth has not been equally distributed across India. India's economy is the 11th largest in the world and over 100 million Indians now belong to the 'middle class', yet almost half the population exists on incomes below US\$1.25 per day.

The manufacturing sector produces steel, chemicals, cement, tools, transport equipment, textiles and consumer goods. Mineral resources including coal, iron ore, oil and natural gas are only partly developed.

LIVING CONDITIONS

"The slow improvement in the health status of our people has been a matter of great concern. We have paid inadequate attention to public health." (Dr Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India, April 2005).

While some southern cities experience a technology boom, one in every 11 Indian children dies before their fifth birthday for lack of low-technology, low-cost interventions. Children die from preventable causes such as diarrhoea and measles, made worse by poor nutrition. Though hospitals and doctors are concentrated in cities, the government has attempted to improve rural health through nutrition, water and immunisation programs.

Most Indians live in rural villages of fewer than 1,000 people. Many villages now have electricity, but only 14% of rural families have adequate sanitation. Landless labourers move to look for work in the cities, where homes of the wealthy contrast sharply with sprawling slums lacking basic services.

HIV and AIDS is of increasing concern in India. The virus has started to cross over from high risk groups to the general population.



These girls are learning to sew, through a community-run program supported by World Vision. The program is extending educational and income opportunities for the girls and their families.

Comparatively speaking...

CATEGORY	INDIA	AUSTRALIA
Population in millions	1,164.7	20.9
Urban population (as % of total)	28.3%	91.9 %
GDP per capita (PPP US\$)	\$2,753	\$34,923
Population living on less than \$2 a day (PPP US\$)	75.6%	0
Population with sustainable access to an improved water source	89%	100%
Adult literacy rate (% age 15 and above)	male - 76.9% female - 54.5 %	male - 99.0% female - 99.0%
Grade 1 children reaching Grade 5	81%	100%
Life expectancy at birth	63.4 years	81.4 years

Source: United Nations Development Programme. 2009, Human Development Report 2009: Overcoming Barriers.

Daily life is still influenced by the caste system. Despite some legal protection, harijans or dalits (formerly called 'untouchables') often face discrimination.

Annual floods in both the north and south of India devastate whole communities. Housing, schools, roads and livelihoods are often destroyed. The work of rebuilding communities and restoring livelihoods is an ongoing process.

EDUCATION

In most states, primary education is free. Enrolments have increased, but government schools lack resources and many children miss classes and leave the school system before finishing their schooling. About one in four girls and more than one in 10 boys do not attend primary school.

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- many children and their families are assisted with needs such as clean water, education and healthcare through child sponsorship
- communities learn to identify their problems, acquire new skills and gain access to government services
- child labour is addressed through education and economic development support for families
- medical treatment is provided for children with physical disabilities
- HIV and AIDS prevention programs have been implemented in high prevalence areas
- emergency relief is provided for those affected by drought, flood or earthquake
- addressing and influencing issues of climate change has become a priority at both the community and national level.

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