

UNIT 1

GETTING STARTED WITH GLOBAL ISSUES



The essence of global issues is a recognition that the people of the world are inexorably linked and that, in today's world, that which touches some touches us all.

—Paula J. Dobriansky
(U.S. Undersecretary of State
for Global Affairs, 2002)

Essential Questions

- What are global issues?
- What is sustainability?
- What is a global perspective?
- How can youth be involved in global issues and sustainable solutions?
- What concepts and tools can help people understand and work toward sustainable solutions?

Chapter 1. Introduction

We are living in an increasingly interconnected world, especially since the advent of the computer age in the twentieth century. This interconnection and integration among people, **economies**^{*}, and societies throughout the world is commonly called **globalization**.

Human beings around the world, now more than ever, are connected to each other. Coca-Cola markets its products all over the world; information about political movements, **terrorism**, and war spread almost instantly via the Internet. Epidemics of disease can spread quickly around the globe via air travel. In many cases, as human beings change the environment in their own communities, they affect the environment of people in other countries. Because of this, it is more important than ever for people to understand some of the basic concepts about global issues and learn how to develop a global perspective.

* Glossary words appear in **bold** the first time they occur in each unit.

This book discusses a number of global issues—issues that affect nearly everyone on the planet. A good place to start is to first define what global issues are and also to define some other important concepts that are important in understanding global issues. Then we will explore some of the most important global issues facing us today, including what kinds of solutions exist that can make life better for people and the planet.

What Are Global Issues?

Global issues are significant issues relating to or involving most or all of the Earth. An issue is likely to be global if it:

- persists or is long-acting
- is **transnational** or **transboundary**
- affects large numbers of people
- is an underlying cause of events
- is connected to other issues that meet these criteria

Global warming serves as a good example of a global issue that meets these criteria. Global warming occurs when **greenhouse gasses** such as **carbon dioxide** (which can result from the

GLOBAL ISSUES MOBILE



burning of **fossil fuels** including coal, oil, and natural gas) build up in the atmosphere and trap heat from the sun. Global warming is *persistent and long-acting* in that it may take years or even decades to be fully felt, and it may require similar time frames to be resolved. Global warming has proven to be *transnational*, meaning that its effects are felt well beyond the borders of countries responsible for creating it. Global warming can *significantly affect millions of people* and is an *underlying cause* of many events such as **desertification** (spreading of desert areas), crop failure, and diminished water supplies.¹ Last, global warming is *interconnected* to many other issues: efforts to slow global warming could in turn positively impact a number of other issues such as food security and **refugee** issues tied to climate change; these efforts could also affect economies, for better or worse.

Under the criteria listed above, many issues could be considered “global.” This book focuses on some of the most pressing global issues recognized today by experts and the public.

Interconnections

A useful metaphor that shows the interconnectedness of global issues is that of a mobile. Although a mobile’s component parts are separate and unique and may move in different directions, they are linked to one another by strings or wires. A force exerted on one part of a mobile will affect all of its other parts—in ways major or minor, sometimes predictable, and sometimes surprising.

A mobile serves as a model of the interconnectedness that is inherent in natural environments, wherein each individual organism is part of an elaborate web of life. Human-made systems and environments also mirror mobiles. For example, a great many of the items consumed in **developed countries** such as the United States are produced in **developing countries**. The production of these consumer goods plays a key role in those countries’ economies, the lives of people there, and the natural environment. The Earth itself is one large, interconnected “system” that may be thought of as a remarkably complex mobile, wherein changes in one part of the system cause changes elsewhere.



Desertification in Darfur contributes to dust storms and resource scarcity

Photo © CARE Evelyn Hockstein

The conflict in Darfur in western Sudan serves as a good example of the global issues mobile. The most recent conflict there began in an arid and impoverished region early in 2003 after a rebel group began attacking **government** targets. The rebels asserted that the government oppressed black Africans in favor of Arabs. As of 2004, it is estimated that as a direct result of this conflict, up to 300,000 Darfur residents died and more than 1.2 million were displaced from their homes.

The region has long suffered from **scarcity** of wood, food, and water, stemming in part from desertification—which many experts believe is caused by human-induced climate change. This resource scarcity created fierce competition for diminishing water and **arable land** between Arab nomadic herders and African farmers. The combination of a high **fertility rate** of about six or seven children per woman and resource scarcity contributed to increased poverty and hunger in the region. The people of Darfur also lacked services, especially those of education, health care, and transportation. The desertification fueled **migration** from rural to urban centers because of a loss of animal resources and crops, as well as due to a lack of job opportunities and services in rural areas.²

The issues underlying the Darfur conflict—resource scarcity, lack of services and education, rapid population growth, migration, and environmental degradation—are interconnected (that is, connected to each other). Like a mobile, a change in one issue (whether positive or negative) clearly affects the other issues.

How might this interconnected mobile reflect other past and present situations around the world?

Imagining a Future that People Want

So why should people care about global issues? One reason is that global issues will, to a large extent, determine what the world will be like in the future. Think for a moment about what future you want.

Most people in the world would agree that they want to enjoy a **good quality of life**. Quality of life means different things to different people, depending on their circumstances and their **culture**. We know that everyone wants good food, clean water, good health, and shelter to stay warm and comfortable. Most people also want to enjoy their friends and family and be part of a community. They don't want to worry about war or some other crisis disrupting their lives.

Like this Thai mother and daughter, most people in the world want a good quality of life for themselves and their family.

*Photo © CARE 2001/
Pairat Saensawat*

People want to ensure that their children and their grandchildren have a good life as well. Most people would say that it is not acceptable for their generation to have a good quality of life and knowingly deprive later generations. Of course, most parents think they are doing their best for their children. But sometimes doing their best for their family and their community can have a negative impact on others and the Earth's long-term ability to support their descendants. And these days, with the global reach of national economies, what people do locally can have an impact on the happiness and well-being of people around the world. As you begin this exploration of global issues, it is important to keep in mind the future you want for yourself, your family, and future generations—at home and around the world.

What is your vision for the future?

Youth in Action!

Claim a Cause, Find Your Voice, and Vote (Portions excerpted from *YES!* magazine, www.yesmagazine.org³)

One way you can begin to address global issues is through civic engagement, whether by simply exercising your right as a citizen to vote or by working to engage others to participate in their community. Among the many ways to address global issues, here is what one inspired young person did in his community to promote **civic engagement**.

Motivated by his concern for the struggle of homeless people in his native San Francisco, William Upski Wimsatt founded the League of Hip-Hop Voters, a grassroots campaign to register young voters and inform them of pressing ballot issues. Wimsatt was concerned that many eighteen-year-old high school students are not even aware that they are of voting age. Wimsatt's organization collaborated through the Internet and meetings to implement voter education programs. These programs are aimed at organizing voters to agree on issues and candidates and at holding elected officials accountable to their campaign promises—and the interests of young citizens.

In the United States, only 36 percent of voters between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four turned out for the 2000 presidential election. (During the 2004 presidential election, 10.5 million eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds voted, raising their estimated turnout to 42 percent.) These low numbers motivate young leaders like Wimsatt to organize and advocate for active citizenship. His efforts are reflected and amplified by numerous other voter registration groups aimed at young people, such as *Rock the Vote* and the *Hip-Hop Summit Action Network*, founded in 2001 by Def Jam Records.



Registering voters on a college campus.
Photo by Leah Barrett

Smaller, more local grassroots organizations also play an important role in educating and inspiring youth to take action at the local level. One example is the Rhythmic Forward Movement, whose founding Blue Scholars group offers these lyrics:⁴

*I'm a blue scholar worker studying the art of labor to create
flavor to relate to listeners, alleviate
the danger associated with strangers
Isn't it strange how we estrange ourselves from our neighbor?
Enables us thru music to connect
releasing fluids in our neck
with the rhythmic forward movement of our heads and back again
Indeed as we succeed the pioneers
maybe give back all that we been taking thru the years
I bleed for what I believe to be the truth
nurturing the seed planted in the fertile youth.*

Now is a good time to begin thinking about global issues and what actions young citizens can take on the local level to create a better world.

Developed and Developing Countries: What's in a Name?

When talking about economic conditions and quality of life in countries around the world, people use many different terms.

Some people use the terms *developed* and *developing* to refer to the differences in levels of wealth and standard of living between different countries around the world. Developed countries have higher average per capita (per-person) incomes; Japan, Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and countries in Western Europe are considered developed countries. Virtually all other countries are considered to be developing.⁵



The World Bank classifies countries based on per capita gross national income. In 2004, low-income countries were defined as those with a per capita income of \$735 or less per year—this means that, on average, each person's income for one year was \$735 or less. Middle-income countries include those with a yearly per capita income ranging from \$736 to \$9,075. High-income countries are those with a yearly per capita income of \$9,076 or more.⁶ This book sometimes refers to low-income countries as poor and high-income countries as rich.

Other terms used by people to describe relative level of development and wealth in different countries are *first*, *second*, and *third world*; *global north* and *global south*; and *high-consuming* and *low-consuming countries*.

Some of these terms can be misleading. For example, some countries that are considered to be developing are not actually experiencing economic growth at all, while many developed countries have economies that continue to grow. In addition, these terms could imply that all countries should try to become developed. In fact, many experts and people in developing countries think some developed countries are actually “over-developed” and need to reduce their use of resources. Finally, categorization of a country as *rich* or *poor* doesn't acknowledge the other factors that might make those people perceive a high quality of life for themselves, such as richness or poverty of culture, tradition, family life, and countless other factors.

Although none of these terms are perfect, this book most often uses the terms developed/developing and rich/poor when highlighting differences between countries' economic status.

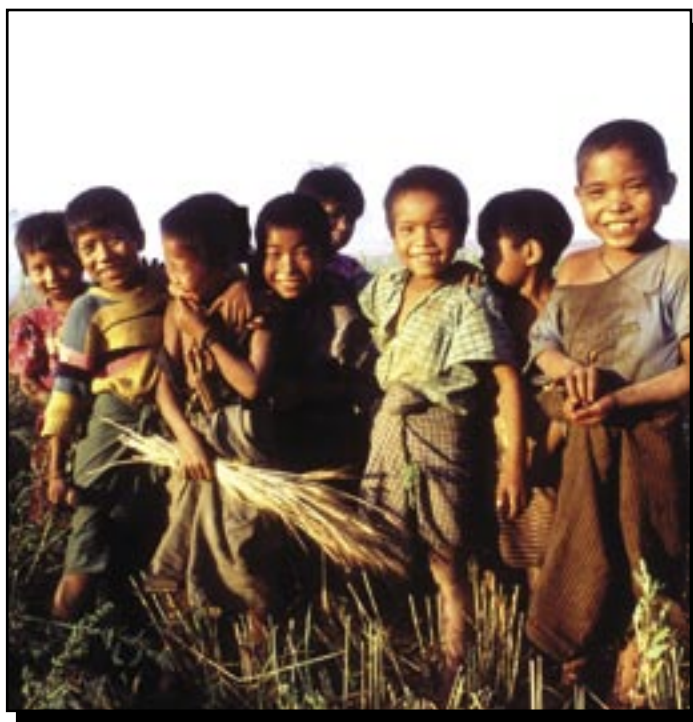
Chapter 2. Understanding Sustainability and Resources

This chapter explores some concepts that are important to the study of global issues, including sustainability, **carrying capacity**, and quality of life.

What Is Sustainability?

Sustainability means that we meet our own needs without limiting the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The “seventh generation” viewpoint of the Native American Iroquois Confederacy presents a good example of the concept of sustainability. This viewpoint requires that tribal leaders consider the effects of their actions on their descendants through the next seven generations.⁷

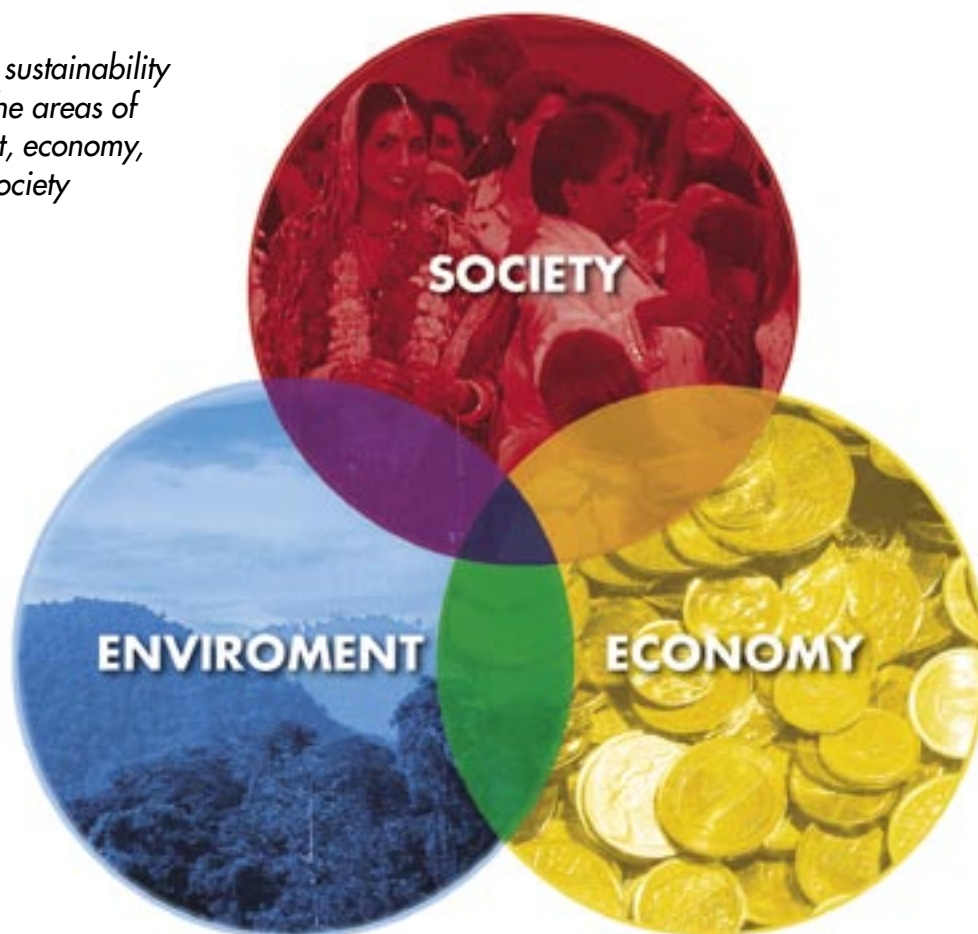
Sustainable solutions to problems that people are facing today not only deal with present challenges, but also include provisions for the well-being of future generations.⁸ The key to sustainability is first knowing what is sufficient for a happy life, then figuring out how most people can have that and also determining how future generations can have it as well. Of course, we can't know how people in the future will define happiness, but we can do our best to ensure that they have the opportunities and resources to figure that out for themselves.



Sustainability means that we meet our own needs without limiting the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Photo by FAO

A measure of sustainability considers the areas of environment, economy, and society



An assessment of sustainability considers three broad areas: environment, economy, and society—each of which must be healthy and viable over time. For example, a sustainable solution to meeting humanity’s energy needs would require that energy resources not be used faster than they can be replaced, or substituted for, and that their use not damage the environment. A sustainable solution should ensure that people’s livelihoods are not compromised and that the livelihoods of future generations are also not compromised. Finally, a sustainable solution should not threaten the cultural traditions or social institutions of present or future generations.

In this book, progress toward sustainability is sometimes called **sustainable development**. This refers to efforts made by nations and organizations that enable people of the world to lead healthy, fulfilling, and economically secure lives without destroying the environment and without endangering the future welfare of people and the planet. One underlying assumption of sustainable development is that economic development alone is not necessarily equated with positive or sustainable growth. Environmental balance and people’s well-being are also important.⁹

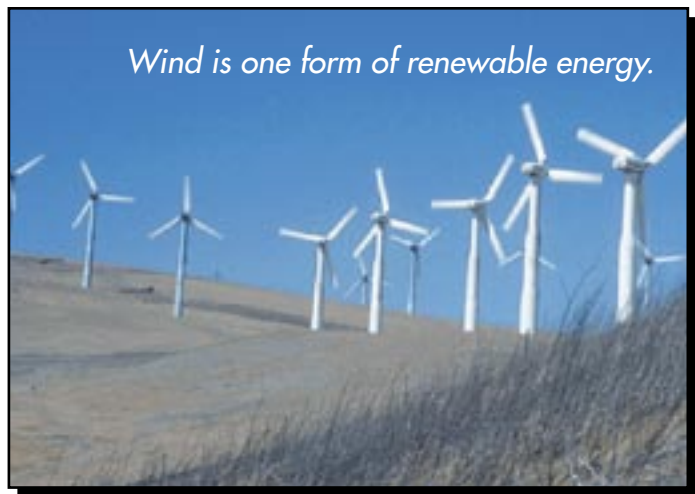
It is important to keep in mind that sustainability is not a finished product but a work in progress. Every step we take in our lives takes us closer to or farther away from a sustainable world. It’s up to each of us to decide what steps we are ready and willing to take on the road to sustainability.

Resources and Carrying Capacity

The environment is one component of sustainability because Earth's resources supply the necessities of a healthy and fulfilling life, and how people use natural resources affects the present and future supply of these resources.

Some of Earth's resources are **renewable**, meaning they can be restored or replenished at basically the same rate they are consumed. Forests and fish are examples of living resources that may be renewed through natural processes, careful management, and conservation. Wind, water, tides, and solar radiation are examples of nonliving renewable resources.

Other resources are **nonrenewable**, meaning they exist in fixed amounts and cannot be quickly renewed or restored by natural or human processes. Nonrenewable resources include metals, minerals, and fossil fuels such as oil, gas, and coal. Resources such as soil and water may be termed either nonrenewable or renewable, depending on circumstances. For example, some underground water reservoirs (**aquifers**) replenish so slowly (over thousands of years), such as the Ogallala Aquifer in the southwestern United States, that they are effectively nonrenewable.



The availability and use, or **consumption**, of renewable and nonrenewable resources are important because they largely determine how many people the Earth can support now and into the future. Earth has an overall carrying capacity, a concept from ecology that refers to the population that an area can support without undergoing environmental deterioration.¹⁰ The Earth's carrying capacity for humans is the maximum number of people the planet can support without causing permanent ecological damage or using up the resources that future generations will need to survive.

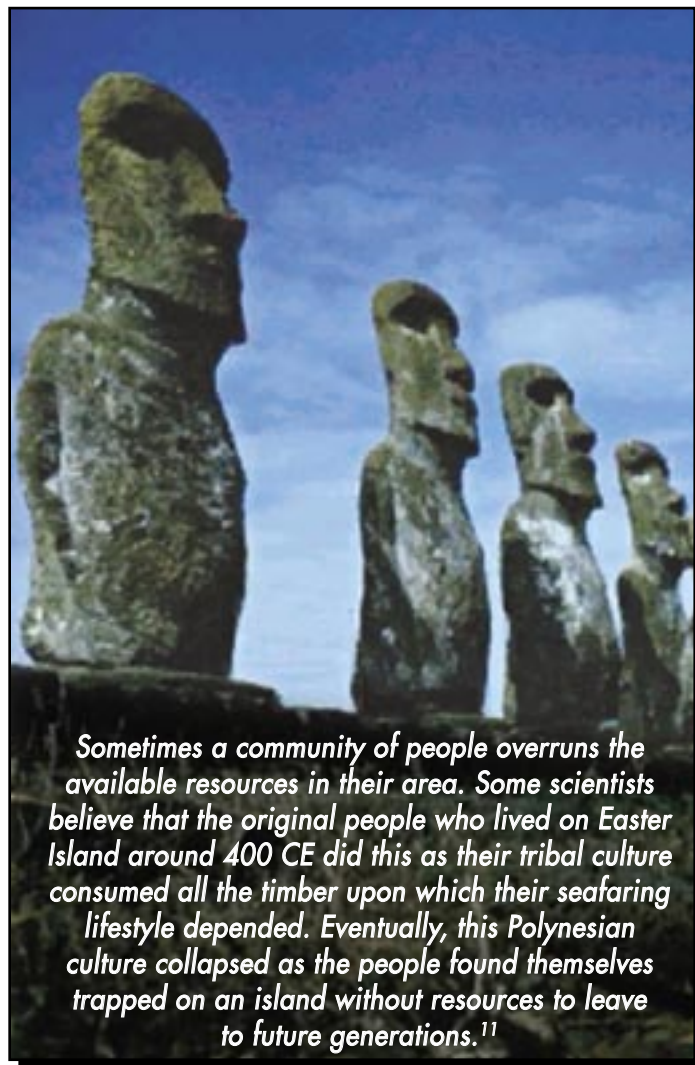
The twentieth-century agricultural revolution, in which food production was greatly increased, is an example of how Earth's carrying capacity can be *enhanced* through improved agricultural technology. Population growth, higher levels of resource use by people, pollution, and habitat destruction are examples of some ways that humans *reduce* Earth's carrying capacity.

Resource Distribution and Scarcity

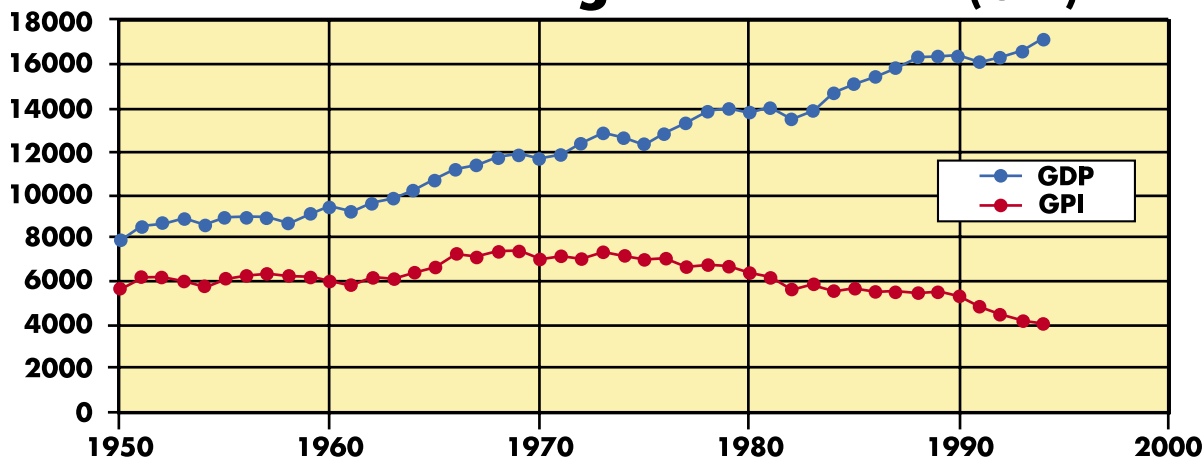
Resources are not naturally distributed equally over the planet. Some places have more or less of a given resource. Fresh water serves as a good example of this. People near a mountain lake might have more than enough water to meet their needs, whereas people in a desert or on an island in the ocean might have very little fresh water. When a particular geographic area has a limited amount of a resource, that area faces **environmental scarcity**.

To deal with environmental scarcities, people have developed systems to redistribute resources. These have led first to local and then to global economies that channel and exchange resources and goods all over the world. However, economies don't always ensure a fair distribution of resources and goods. Unequal distribution is an example of a **structural scarcity**, since it depends on how particular economies are structured.

Working toward sustainability involves understanding how resources are distributed, how they are used, and how they renew. Sustainability involves understanding the types and causes of scarcity and determining how they can be best addressed to equitably meet the needs of all people.



U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) vs Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI)



This graph compares the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) over a 50 year period.

Quality of Life—How Do We Measure It?

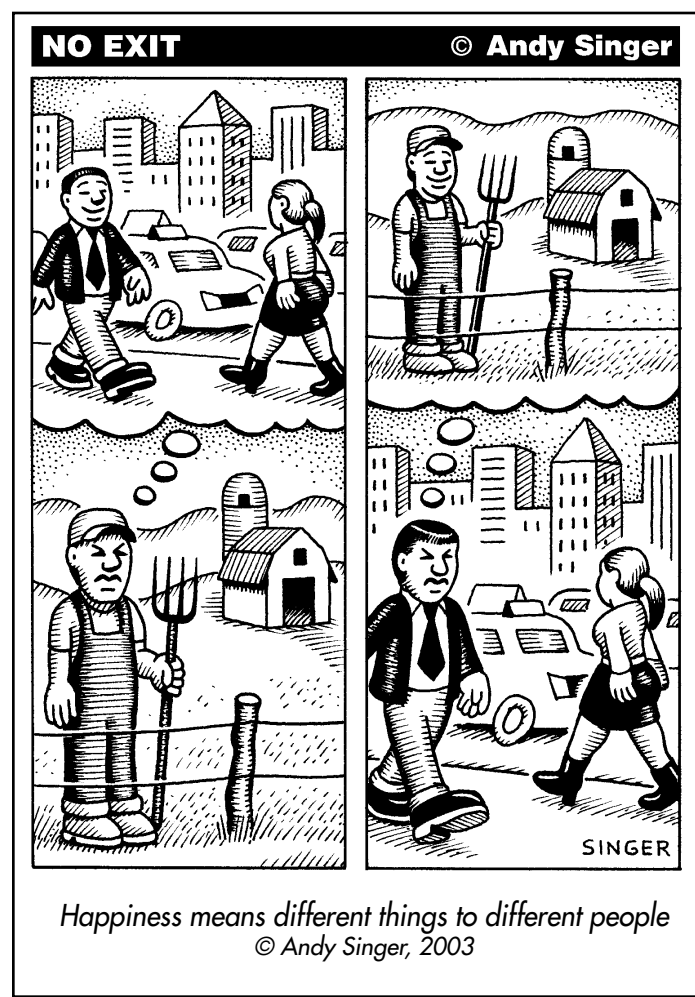
In exploring the environmental, economic, and social aspects of sustainability, it is important to consider the well-being or quality of life of people around the world. A number of factors contribute to an individual's quality of life, some of which can be measured or tracked. These include a person's income and his or her access to education, health care, goods, and services. Other contributors to quality of life are harder to measure, such as happiness, creative expression, religious or spiritual involvement, and the relative degree of freedom and justice enjoyed by an individual. One important question to think about when considering global issues is how all of these, and other diverse qualities of the human experience, can be measured.

In trying to assess quality of life, experts have developed **quality of life indicators** to measure the extent to which people have met their needs and wants. Many countries use the **gross domestic product (GDP)**, which quantifies economic production, as a measure for quality of life. GDP is a calculation of the total monetary value of goods and services produced annually in a country.¹² GDP increases with any kind of economic growth, even if that growth results from a disaster (such as a hurricane) or negative events (such as when people get cancer).

Whereas GDP measures a country's economic production, other indicators can help people measure aspects of well-being and quality of life that are not captured in the GDP. For example, the **Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI)**, developed by the nonprofit organization Redefining Progress, is a measurement that adds the value of nonmaterial services, such as paid and volunteer work, but subtracts negative things such as crime, pollution, and divorce. The Genuine Progress Indicator quantifies the value of housework, caring for children and the elderly, volunteerism, and the hours spent on free time or family and community activities—all of which can be viewed as good for the economy, despite no money changing hands.¹³ New quality of life

indicators can help people figure out what behaviors and actions are environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable.

How would you measure progress in your own community and country?



Chapter 3. Sustainable Solutions: New Ways of Thinking

*We can't solve problems by using
the same level of thinking we used
when we created them.*

—Albert Einstein
(twentieth-century
German physicist and
Nobel laureate)

The preceding two chapters cover some concepts that are important to the study of global issues. Now this chapter frames an approach to sustainable solutions and offers some effective tools and ways of thinking about global issues.

Personal and Structural Solutions

Throughout this book we help identify some **personal solutions** that individuals can take to increase sustainability. We also discuss **structural solutions** that address the underlying cause of problems and often require action by governments and nations. Structural solutions usually occur when governments enact policies and laws that encourage or discourage certain behaviors by large segments of the population.

Both types of solutions are important because, as with the global issues mobile, solutions to many of the issues facing us today are interconnected. For example, you may not be able to recycle (a personal solution to resource scarcity) if there is no **infrastructure** in your community to support it. You can, however, encourage local governments to build that infrastructure (a structural solution).



In some cases, this book suggests personal and structural solutions, but it is also important for you to think about other solutions to address global issues.

Personal solutions for sustainability include individual actions, such as recycling.

Photo by G. Wheeler

Policies and Sustainability

In some ways, sustainability is about making choices as an individual. The choices we make as individuals influence the choices that we make as a society. And the choices we make as a society can have a global impact.

Structural solutions primarily occur through government decisions and policies. All governments, regardless of their type, set policies that encourage or discourage certain economic and social behaviors in their populations and their neighbor nations. For example, governments set policies on land use, borders, and access to rivers, coasts, and raw resources (such as minerals and forests). Governments also control rights to transportation routes (air, land, and sea), trade, communication (radio and television airwaves), utilities (power and water), and processes and inventions via patents. They impose or grant relief from taxes on transactions, grant **subsidies** (money given to businesses to encourage something the government believes is desirable) for investing in certain products and services, and regulate how businesses operate. Governments also typically control the management of retirement funds, social welfare programs, and health services for citizens. They also grant citizenship to **immigrants**, which allows them to participate in the country's society and economy.



Structural solutions primarily occur through government decisions and policies

Policies are set at all levels of government: local, state, and federal. In a **representative government**, the interests of different groups are weighed by the government, typically through a legislative body, which is lobbied by **stakeholders** to have their interests recognized. Once enacted, policies are enforced, depending on the type government, by force of law or force of arms.

Government policies have large effects, because policies influence what jobs or businesses are available to people, what education people have for those jobs, and how much people and businesses will be taxed. These policies structure a country's economic life. Changing policies to reflect more sustainable behaviors can effect a structural change in a country and in some cases in the world. This book looks at some past, present, and potential future policies and their effects on global issues and solutions.

Systems Thinking: A Framework for the Future

Systems thinking takes a comprehensive approach to problem solving that is well suited to global issues. It is a field of study that looks carefully at all the important components of a system and how they interrelate. Systems thinking offers a particular perspective, a specialized language, and a set of tools that can be used to address problems. It has been an important tool for many businesses and is a useful way to address global issues.

A *system* is a group of interrelated components that form a complex and unified whole. Systems are everywhere. For example, your school and classroom, the circulatory system in your body, and the predator/prey relationships in nature are all systems.

This organic fair trade coffee farm in Jinotega, Nicaragua is one example of a dynamic system which depends on and is affected by the interactions of people and the environment.

*Photo © 2002
April Pojman,
Courtesy of Photoshare*

Ecological systems and human social systems are living systems; human-made systems such as cars and washing machines are nonliving systems. Most systems thinkers focus their attention on living systems, especially human social systems. Other systems thinkers are also interested in how human social systems affect the larger ecological systems of our planet.

Suppose a landfill in a city becomes full, leaving the citizens with nowhere to put their garbage. A nonsystems approach to this problem might be to build another landfill or find a landfill in another city that would take the garbage for a fee. A systems thinking approach would look not only at these two options, but also at other aspects to this problem and ask a number of questions: Where does the garbage come from? What's in the garbage? Is there a way to reduce the amount of

garbage produced? Is there a use for the garbage? Answering these questions could give the city a number of alternatives, including starting or expanding a recycling program, raising fees for garbage disposal as an incentive for citizens to create less garbage, or working with manufacturers to produce less packaging for their products, thus leaving fewer materials to throw out.

A systems thinking approach can help structure the study and analysis of global issues in such a way as to account for the interconnections between environment, economy, and society. This greatly improves the chance of achieving sustainable solutions. Systems thinking can help people seek out underlying causes and address them in solutions, rather than merely responding to surface events and leaving the system unchanged.

Worldview

Understanding people's **worldview**—their beliefs and assumptions about how the world works—is a key component of systems thinking. People's worldviews are influenced by major cultural forces in their lives, such as history, family, politics, religion, and education. It is a powerful force in what people do and believe—even, and often, when they are not aware of it.

Worldview is often what some people believe to be true about the world, but other people in the world may not believe it to be true. For example, if you visited India you might be surprised to see cows wandering around freely. That's because in many countries, cows are owned by farmers and ranchers and kept in pens or otherwise fenced in, but in India cows are considered sacred and are often seen roaming freely. So for many people, their worldview about cows would be that they are owned by people and live in enclosures, whereas the worldview of a person in India regarding cows would be different.

As you study global issues and explore solutions, it is important to keep in mind how different worldviews affect problems and their solutions.



The Iceberg Model

One model that is helpful for understanding global issues is the iceberg model often used in systems thinking. We know that an iceberg has only 10 percent of its total mass above the water while 90 percent of it is underwater. But that 90 percent is what the ocean currents act on and what creates the iceberg's behavior at its tip. Global issues can be looked at in this same way. If we apply the iceberg model to global issues, we would say that at the tip, above the water, are *events*, or things that we see or hear about happening in the world, such as a bomb blast in Iraq, a catastrophic flood in China, a terrorist attack in Spain, or an oil spill in Alaska. The events that we hear about in the news represent the iceberg tip.

If we look just below the water line, we often start to see *patterns*, or the recurrence of events. This might be multiple terrorist attacks around the world or recurring oil spills. Patterns are important to identify because they indicate that an event is not an isolated incident.

Like the different levels of an iceberg, deep beneath the patterns are the *underlying structures* or root causes that create or drive those patterns. For example, the underlying structure of a problem such as recurring oil spills might be our dependence on fossil fuels. If you looked only at the event, you might think

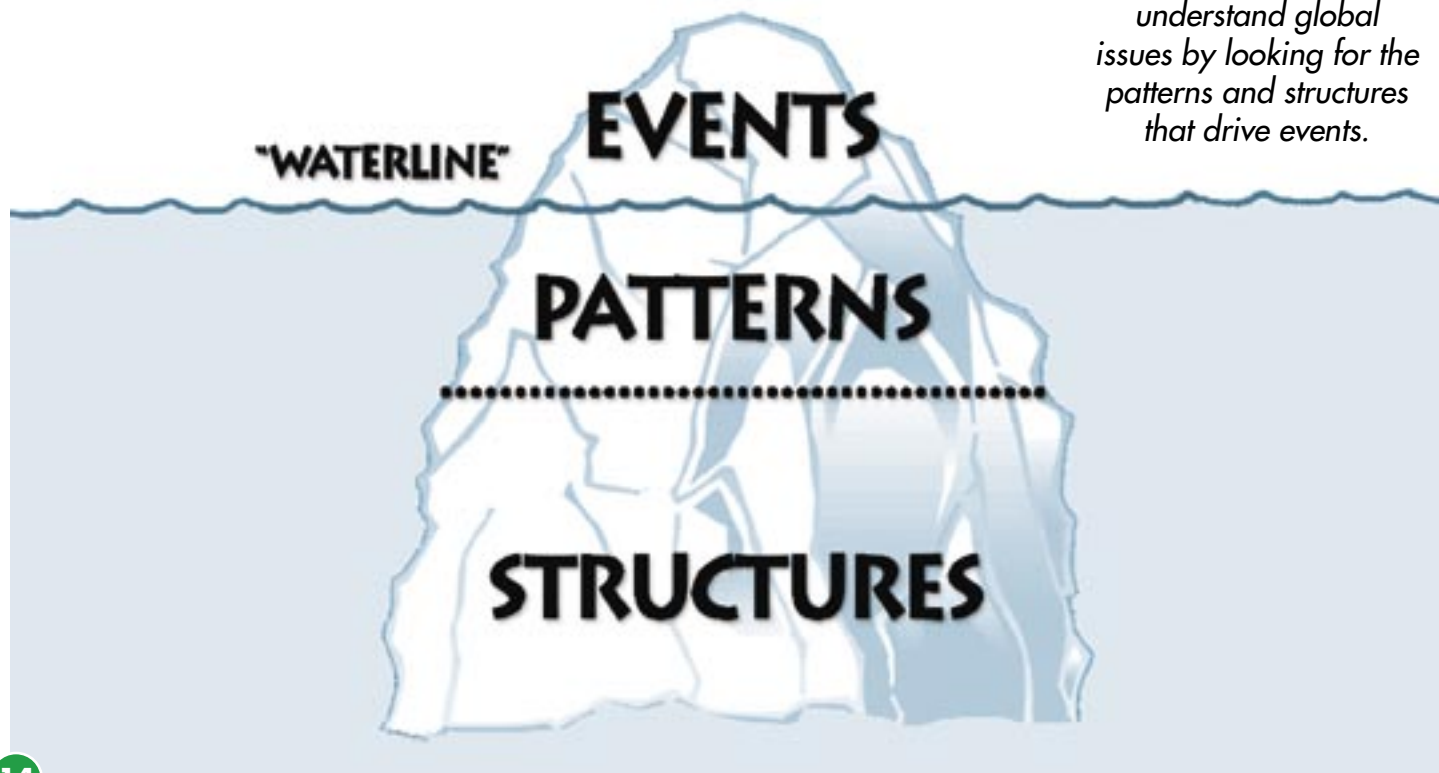
that we should just build stronger tankers and better pipelines. But if you look at the root cause of such spills, you can start to understand and address long-term, sustainable solutions such as developing energy sources that do not rely on oil transportation.

Finally, at the very base of the iceberg are the *assumptions* and *worldviews* that have created or sustained the structures that are in place. The important thing to understand is that in solving problems, the greatest leverage is in changing the structure—applying deep ocean currents to move the iceberg, which will change the events at its tip.

An example of the iceberg model can be seen in our own health. Catching a cold is an event, and catching colds more often when we are tired is a *pattern*. The *systemic structures* or causes for getting tired might include overwork, unhealthy diet, or insufficient rest. We tend to get lost in the immediate event of suffering from a cold, forgetting that it is part of a pattern of events that is caused by the underlying structures of our lifestyle.¹⁴ If we take a systems thinking approach to solving the problem of frequent colds, we would try to find ways to make ourselves less overtired, rather than just focusing on the immediate relief (in the form of aspirin or other medicine) that solves the problem of the current cold.

What global issues might the iceberg model help us analyze?

ICEBERG MODEL



The iceberg model can be a helpful way to understand global issues by looking for the patterns and structures that drive events.

Seeing From Multiple Perspectives and Thinking Critically

Another useful tool in the study of global issues is being able to look at an issue from **multiple perspectives**. This refers to valuing cultural and intellectual diversity and promoting healthy competition and sharing of ideas. This is in contrast to viewing and considering global issues solely from the perspective of one particular group, belief system, or worldview.

The study of history provides a good example of using a multiple perspectives approach. To enrich the writing of history, historians draw not only from the biographies of famous figures, but also from the multiple perspectives of everyday working people, as well as people of various ethnic and religious backgrounds. Just as a thorough grasp of history must include the many different voices from the past, the study of global issues and sustainable solutions deserves an airing of many viewpoints.

How might different groups of people perceive, understand, and begin to solve a particular global issue?

Critical thinking is another important concept and tool for a student of global issues. Critical thinking is the process of acquiring information and evaluating it to reach a logical conclusion or answer. Critical thinking requires thinking carefully and deeply, with concern for accurate evidence to support generalizations, arguments, and ideas. The study of global issues requires us to constantly make connections between the environment, economy, and society. It requires the analysis of competing arguments around difficult and relatively new topics, such as carrying capacity and sustainability. Critical thinking means asking questions, both small and large. For example, a critical thinker might ask:

- **Is there any evidence for a particular position?**
- **Is the evidence credible (believable)?**
- **What are other positions?**
- **Does the range of positions account for the scope of the issue or problem?**
- **Are positions solution-oriented?**
- **Does the solution meet the standard of sustainability?**

Worldview: How U.S. Citizens View Their Role in the World

Research has shown that there are a number of positive values that hold an important place in the worldview of many U.S. citizens. These values together constitute a vision that many hold for how the United States should act in the world and for how U.S. citizens would like to be perceived by the world.

Some of these commonly held values have origins in personal, cultural, and national history and include being pragmatic (practical and realistic), smart, farsighted, trustworthy, collaborative, and principled (wanting to “do the right thing”). Studies reveal that U.S. citizens are interested in international issues, want to see the United States act as a respectful citizen in the world community, and are eager for strong leadership in the United States’ role in world affairs.¹⁵

While these general values might lead one U.S. citizen to be an “interventionist” (favoring American involvement in foreign affairs) and another U.S. citizen to be an “isolationist” (favoring minimal U.S. involvement in other nations’ issues), they nonetheless constitute a worldview of shared values through which new ideas and information are filtered and prioritized. Understanding these commonly held values can be a powerful starting point for solving problems.



Youth volunteering after a tornado. Photo courtesy of FEMA

TECHNOLOGY CONNECTION:



NAVIGATING THE GLOBAL ISSUES NET

The Internet is a defining trait of globalization, an electronic highway of information that connects the world. Some think of the Internet as one large book that the world is writing. How can someone navigating this huge resource know whether it is a reliable source of information?

On one hand, the Internet is an essential and remarkably productive tool for exploring global issues, especially because it can provide up-to-date information from a range of sources, including governmental, commercial, and nongovernmental websites. The Internet was an essential resource in creating this book, and readers should refer frequently to endnote references to trace the origins of borrowed information.

On the other hand, the “global issues net” is huge and uneven in both quality and reliability. In addition to being immensely time consuming, “surfing the net” can be overwhelming—and even misleading, if done recklessly or uncritically. Below are some tips for getting the greatest return from your Internet access.

Internet User Guidelines

To find out if an Internet site you are visiting is a reliable source of information, ask the questions below before you start paraphrasing or quoting it, downloading files, or printing out information. Of course, there is no guarantee that a good website will pass every test on this list; however, an unreliable website will usually fail to meet several of these criteria.

1. What is the address or Universal Resource Locator (URL) for the site? What does this indicate about the type of organization that has produced the site? (.edu is an educational institution, .org is a non-profit or other nongovernmental organization, .gov is a governmental body, and .com is a corporation or company.) Is this a permanent address that you can confidently cite in a paper or project, or is it a temporary page?
2. Who is the author or sponsor of the material? Does the website clearly indicate who wrote the information or what organization is responsible for its content? Be wary of personal websites that are not affiliated with an organization. They tend to be less accountable and less reliable.
3. Who is the audience for this website? Is it intended for scholarly use? Popular use? Entertainment? Is the site primarily commercial in nature? Is the site designed to educate or to sell a product or point of view?

4. What are the scholarly standards and reputation of the sponsoring organization or individual? Is there any indication that the site has been reviewed? Has it won any educational awards or commendations?
5. What was the original source of the material? In other words, how does the site know what it knows? What was the process for digitizing material? Was any information lost in that process? Can you still access the original copy, if necessary, at an archive or library?
6. Is the site complete or a work in progress? How might additions or corrections affect the claims you wish to make? How might this make proper source citation difficult?
7. Are the documents a selection from a larger collection? What were the criteria for selection? Who selected this material for posting on the Internet?
8. Are graphics, sound, and other multimedia features provided to give you information for your research? Are these features relevant to the information on the site?
9. How long has the site been in existence? When was the last time material on the page was updated? How long will the material remain on-line?
10. Is there a recommended way to cite material from this collection? When you borrow information by paraphrasing or direct quotations, always give the authors or sponsors full credit in your references.



Global Issues on the Internet: Useful Starting Points

Another way to help make sense of the Internet is to write an annotated bibliography (a brief description and evaluation of the source) for websites you visit, similar to what is offered below. Include a citation with the website name and URL address on the first line, followed by a paragraph that summarizes the website's content and its usefulness for different audiences. The following are examples of governmental, intergovernmental, and nongovernmental websites:

The CIA World Factbook, <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>

Drawing on the considerable information-gathering ability of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, the U.S. government has made a wealth of information about every nation in the world available to the public, free of charge, on this governmental website. The CIA World Factbook is limited to "finished intelligence," or "the final product of the Intelligence Cycle ready to be delivered to the policymaker." The entire factbook is updated at least annually, with much of it updated more frequently. The central feature of the factbook is its simple main page, with a pull-down menu to "Select a Country" (listed alphabetically). This takes the viewer to that nation's title page, with a flag and map, followed by detailed, to-the-point information on these major topics: historical background, geography, people, government, economy, communications,

*Map of the internet showing
worldwide network connections
on a single day in 2003.*

Map created by the OPTI Project.



transportation, military, and transnational issues. For a starting point to research a country or compare countries, The CIA World Factbook is a powerful and easily navigated resource.

United Nations, <http://www.un.org/english/>

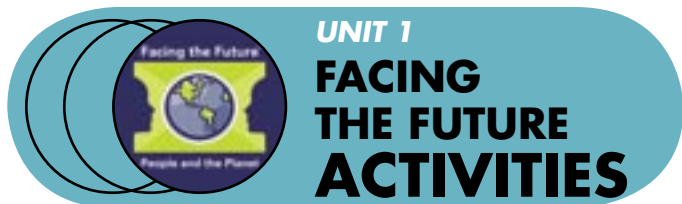
The United Nations (UN) website is probably one of the largest intergovernmental Internet sources available. These are just some of the topical links offered from the UN home page: news center; daily briefing; media; documentation and maps; publications, stamps, and databases; peace and security; economic and social development; human rights; humanitarian affairs; and international law. The home page offers options for both keyword searching and for a detailed subject index. Because of the sheer size of the UN website, the viewer may have the best luck by first reviewing the index for a desired subject. In terms of understanding the UN's goals for global issues, the UN Millennium Development Goals link is especially important, as are the full economic and human development reports, issued annually.

Wikipedia—The Free Encyclopedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/>

One efficient way to explore global issues and expand global issues **literacy** is through the free on-line encyclopedia Wikipedia. Wikipedia is written collaboratively by its readers, with the goal of creating "a reliable and free encyclopedia—indeed, the largest encyclopedia in history, in both breadth and depth." The purpose of Wikipedia—to reach out to the entire planet to build a multilanguage dictionary—is its blessing and its curse. Wikipedia seeks submissions with a neutral point of view and has a process for editing and revision. The results are impressive, and the site is easily searched by keyword(s) from the main page, taking the viewer directly to articles that not only "define," but also "explain" the query, offering valuable history, context, debate, and links to other related topics. Given the diverse origins of Wikipedia content, it is a good idea to start there, then cross-reference with another source.

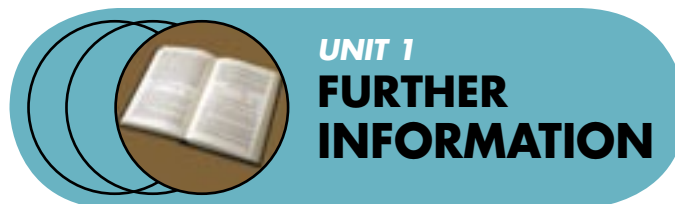
Facing the Future: People and the Planet, www.facingthefuture.org

The publisher of this book is a nonprofit organization. The extensive references (endnotes) listed at the back of this book for each unit in the book provide examples of the numerous nonprofit and **nongovernmental organizations** (NGOs) of all types and sizes that provide essential services and information around global issues, ranging from political lobbying and activism to education and research. Facing the Future's mission is to provide "teachers, students, and the public with sustainability and global issues educational materials and action opportunities to shape our future." Facing the Future's programs address the "interconnected issues of population, poverty, consumption, peace and conflict, and the environment." Used by students, teachers, and the public at large, Facing the Future provides information, links, and resources on global issues, sustainability, and service learning. This website is navigated through a series of interconnected websites and links.



- **From Issue to Opportunity**
(defining and exploring global issues)
- **Creating Our Future**
(envisioning and taking action for a future that people want)
- **What's in the News**
(using the iceberg model to analyze the news)
- **Worldview Mingle**
(understanding how our worldview affects us and others)

To download activities visit <http://www.facingthefuture.org>



For in-depth information about sustainability and sustainable development, visit <http://www.iisd.org/>, the website of the International Institute for Sustainable Development.

For explanation of Genuine Progress Indicator, visit Redefining Progress at <http://www.redefiningprogress.org>.

For a brief, reader-friendly explanation of systems thinking, read the book, *Introduction to Systems Thinking*, by Daniel H. Kim, Pegasus Communications, Inc., 1999.

