



State of the World Report: China and India Hold the Balance

The dramatic rise of China and India presents one of the gravest threats—and greatest opportunities—facing the world today, says the Worldwatch Institute in its *State of the World* report. The choices these countries make in the next few years will lead the world either towards a future beset by growing ecological and political instability—or down a development path based on efficient technologies and better stewardship of resources.

“Rising demand for energy, food, and raw materials by 2.5 billion Chinese and Indians is already having ripple effects worldwide,” says Worldwatch. “Meanwhile, record-shattering consumption levels in the U.S. and Europe leave little room for this projected Asian growth.”

In the meantime, the United States (and Canada) still consumes three times as much grain per person as China and five times as much as India, notes the report. Per-capita carbon dioxide emissions are six times the Chinese level and 20 times the Indian level. If China and India were to consume resources and produce pollution at the current U.S. per-capita level, it would require two planet Earths just to sustain their two economies.

“We were encouraged to find that a growing number of opinion leaders in China and India now recognize that the resource-intensive model for economic growth can't work in the 21st century,” said Worldwatch president. “Already, China’s world-leading solar industry provides water heating for 35 million buildings, and India’s pioneering use of rainwater harvesting brings clean water to tens of thousands of homes. China and India are positioned to leapfrog today’s industrial powers and become

world leaders in sustainable energy and agriculture within a decade.”

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In 2005, China alone used 26 percent of the world’s steel, 32 percent of the rice, and 47 percent of the cement. Though their per-capita resource consumption is still low, with their huge populations, China and India are joining the US and Europe as ecological superpowers whose demands on the world’s ecosystems will vastly outstrip those of other countries, according to the report.

The *State of the World* report calls for broader cooperation between China, India, Europe, and the US to develop new energy and agricultural systems, maximize resource efficiency, and continue recent progress towards participatory decision-making in China and India. Educational and professional exchanges should also be stepped up. Additionally, it is urgent that China and India be invited into key international bodies such as the G-8 and the International Energy Agency, says the report.

“The rise of China and India is the wake-up call that should prompt people around the world to take seriously the need for strong commitments to build sustainable economies,” the paper concludes. “Viewing this colossal shift in global geopolitics as an opportunity rather than a challenge holds the greatest prospect for ensuring a stable and peaceful twenty-first century.”

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