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Geography—the essential subject

Geography is about inquiring into the world we live in, the people and cultures that inhabit it and the unique environments that make up the planet. Geographers investigate change over time by researching and analysing current trends, then using this information to develop scenarios about the future. Geography promotes the sustainable management of human settlement and the human use of the world and its precious resources.

1.1.1 Geography has always been about the world we live in. As technology has improved, so too has our world view. Distant places or far-off lands were once a source of intrigue and wonder. Today we can access most of the planet with relative ease. As a result, the study of geography increasingly involves the likely future of the planet as our population grows beyond 7 billion.

Why geography?

Geographers investigate the natural and human processes that shape the world today. By studying these processes they are able to influence the sort of world we will leave for future generations. Our world view is constantly changing: the growth of communications technology means that the world is a smaller place than it was for previous generations; population growth has placed increasing demands on the planet's resources; inequality in access to resources exists between countries; and some of the global processes that are essential to sustaining life on earth are presenting dilemmas for the future that need real solutions now.

Geography is the essential subject: through the study of geography we aim to manage all aspects of the interactions between the human and the physical environments and promote a better future based on principles such as ecological sustainability, social justice and equity for all.

Physical and human geography

Geography involves the study of two distinct yet interrelated areas: physical geography and human geography.

Physical geographers study the features of the earth, the formation and shaping of landforms, the development of ecosystems and the distribution of habitats and the animals that make them up. Using this knowledge, they are able to explain spatial patterns of ecosystems and physical environments across the globe, and consider the best ways to manage these environments for the future.

Human geographers study the people of the world. They study all aspects of human settlement and population, from farming activities through to production and the development of cities. They study the factors shaping cultures and consider the vast array of dilemmas facing a planet whose population is approaching 7 billion people.

Physical and human geography are interrelated by their very nature. Geographical issues arise as a result of the interaction of people and their environment. In studying geography it is essential to develop a clear understanding of the physical processes shaping the world and the