

## Challenge Overview Sheet

# GLOBAL MIDDLE CLASS

The global **development gap** has undergone a transformation in recent years. Arguably, this transformation eclipses Europe's historic industrial revolution in terms of its overall importance for human welfare. Since 1990, over one billion people have joined a **global middle class** that earns at least \$10 a day. Another 2 billion belong to the **fragile middle** - a group sandwiched between the middle class and the 'bottom billion' (the billion people who still live in absolute poverty on \$1.25 a day, or less). This is a far cry from the stark division that used to exist between the affluent 'first world' and a 'third world' composed of billions of people earning less than \$1 a day (conditions which prevailed until the mid 20thC).

The majority of those in the new middle class and the fragile middle live in **emerging economies**, or **newly-industrialised countries**, such as the **BRIC** and **MINT** groups (including Brazil, Russia, India and China, - Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey). The bottom billion are found in the world's **least developed countries** (LDCs) many of which are located in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

The recent exit from poverty of so many people means that significant progress has been made towards meeting the **Millennium Development Goals** (MDGs). Poverty alleviation targets established in 2000 have been met in many Latin America, north Africa and large parts of Asia (further details on the MDGs and international development can be found on [www.rgs.org/glp](http://www.rgs.org/glp)). However, by tackling the human challenge of poverty, key physical challenges have intensified. Global consumption of energy, water and food has grown at a much faster rate than global population in recent decades, reflecting the growth in size of the average human's **ecological footprint**. Once people reach middle class status, they have increasing amounts of 'leftover' money once essential food, heat, clothing and shelter have been paid for. Rapid individual ecological footprint growth occurs once people start to purchase manufactured goods such as fridges, TVs and mobile phones.

Can the Earth cope? Is humanity set to become a victim of its own success, with global poverty alleviation triggering a wave of global crises linked with **water security, food security, energy security** and **climate security**? This scheme of work encourages students to think critically about how a lessened global development gap brings a raft of new physical challenges. For example, it is important to consider the impact of China's growth on raising millions of people out of absolute poverty, whilst still presenting significant challenges. Students are encouraged to investigate how:

- innovative and important work towards developing **new technologies** to tackle resource shortages is taking place in emerging economies like China and India
- emerging economies have become leaders in **renewable energy**

This scheme of work has relevance for the study of all major A-level geography Specifications as well as the International Baccalaureate diploma programme in geography.