

Word study: Building an academic vocabulary

TASK 9

One way to remember your growing vocabulary is to group the new words into sets according to their meanings. All of these verbs share the idea of causing something to happen. Group them into the following sets:

Cause + START

Cause + HARM

Cause + MORE

Cause + LESS

aggravate

create

cut

damage

dislodge

double

halve

hamper

increase

lower

precipitate

raise

reduce

restrict

set off

worsen

Here are some of the ways these words are used in this book:

- 1 Deforestation and desertification *aggravate* floods and droughts.
- 2 The environment makes it difficult to *create* the agricultural surplus required for development.
- 3 Many animals, especially predators, need a wide territory. If this is *reduced*, in the short term drought, disease or war may *cut* their numbers.
- 4 Overfishing will *damage* fish stocks.
- 5 There are precipitating factors, the events which *dislodge* the last food security of the poor, *setting off* the secondary events which *worsen* the situation
- 6 In the last 25 years, the population of the world has *doubled*.
- 7 In Sri Lanka the death rate was *halved* over ten years by spraying the mosquitoes which carry malaria.
- 8 Civil wars have severely *hampered* food distribution.
- 9 Fertilizer and irrigation can *increase* the productivity of the developing world.
- 10 Small-scale, labour-intensive technologies and basic health care involving the community can *lower* the cost of investment.
- 11 For famine to be *precipitated*, governmental famine-prevention administration must be inadequate, incompetent, or unable to operate.
- 12 The sea water is warmed but not *raised* to boiling point.
- 13 Water shortage *restricts* the areas where three crops a year are possible.

Disasters, of course, are not entirely due to the injustice of nature: the injustice of man also plays its part. Poverty contributes both to the causation and impact of disaster. It is a major cause of deforestation and desertification which aggravate floods and droughts. Poverty and the pressure of population drive the poor to live in increasingly dangerous places, like slums perched on steep slopes, or the flood- and cyclone-ridden islands of the Ganges delta in Bangladesh. Poor people can afford only flimsy houses of wood, mud and straw, liable to collapse in a heavy storm. Serious disasters appear to be increasing in frequency. A study by the University of Bradford found that the average number per year rose from five between 1919 and 1971, to eleven between 1951 and 1971, and over seventeen between 1968 and 1971. It seems unlikely that nature's inclemency is growing at this rate. The increase is probably due to the increasing disaster-proneness of the poor. But disasters of themselves accentuate poverty and make their victims more disaster-prone for the future.

- 1 a) Poverty makes the poor more disaster-prone, which results in more disasters and hence more poverty.
- b) The homes of poor people are easily destroyed in disasters.
- c) Poverty results in deforestation and desertification which contribute to other disasters.

All in all, the physical environment has not favoured the developing countries. The low productivity of the soil and of man has hampered growth and, along with the setbacks of variable rains and disasters, helped to prevent the emergence of a large and stable agricultural surplus. Such a surplus is the first requirement of development.

- 2 a The soil in many developing countries is not very productive.
- b Development requires a stable agricultural surplus.
- c The environment makes it difficult to create the agricultural surplus required for development.

There are some potential advantages in being closer to the sun. Given enough fertilizer and water, year-round sunshine can create an extraordinary agricultural potential, allowing as much as three crops a year. But water shortage restricts the areas where this is possible. As the oil runs out and solar power becomes more economical, the Third World will have greater supplies of endlessly renewable energy than the developed temperate zone countries.

- 3 a Fertilizer and irrigation can increase the productivity of the developing world.
- b Two potential advantages of ample sunshine are increased agricultural output and solar energy.
- c The developed world has less solar energy potential than the developing world.

But these prospects are as yet only hypothetical. Up to the present day, the hostile environment has been one of the key restraints in holding back economic development. It has raised the threshold of investment that the developing countries need to leap before they can industrialize. They need to invest more than western countries did at similar stages, in irrigation, flood control and erosion control for agriculture, and in human resources, to combat the effect of disease and heat on labour productivity.

- 4 a) Development has been held back because of the higher investment needed to overcome the effects of the environment.
- b) Irrigation and erosion control are very expensive for developing countries.
- c) Heat and disease reduce labour productivity.

This investment hurdle was leapt in water control by the ancient empires of the Middle East, Asia and South America. It can be leapt again. Small-scale, labour-intensive technologies and basic health care involving the community can lower the cost of investment, while foreign aid and loans can help provide the necessary funds.

- 5 a) The ancient empires of the Middle East, Asia and South America solved the problem of irrigation.
- b) The investment problem can be overcome by focusing on less-expensive technologies and community health care and by using loans and aid money.
- c) Foreign aid and loans can help development.

[Source: Harrison, P. (1993) *Inside the Third World*, 3rd Edition (London: Penguin Books Ltd)]