

Many observers now ask will India be able to sustain its rapid growth despite the widening gap between rich and poor. Campaigners believe that the economic disparities and social divisions have never been greater in the history of the country.

Answer key:

- 1 t
- 2 t
- 3 f
- 4 t
- 5 t
- 6 f
- 7 t
- 8 f

Listen to a report on the widening gap between rich and poor in India.**Optional activity:**

While you listen, decide if the statements below are true or false.

- 1 India is the 12th richest country in the world.
 - 2 India's economy is growing three times faster than the United States.
 - 3 A quarter of India's population are very wealthy.
 - 4 Over half the people in Mumbai live in poor housing conditions.
 - 5 Most of India's population live in rural areas.
 - 6 250,000 people marched to Delhi in a protest about poverty.
 - 7 Many poor farmers have sold or lost their land.
 - 8 The differences between rich and poor are decreasing in India.
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India is the second most populous country in the world and the world's 12th wealthiest in 2005, according to the World Bank. The country's economy is growing very fast. In the US and many EU countries average GDP growth was around 3% last year, compared to 9% growth in India. The economy is heading for 10% growth this year, but not everyone in India is benefiting from this boom.

While India has the most billionaires in Asia, many of the country's poor are actually getting poorer. There are over 1 billion people in India and 25% live in abject poverty. A UN report in 2006 pointed out that two-thirds of India has no access to sanitation. A case in point is Mumbai, India's biggest city where almost 55% of the city's population live in slums, close to 8 million people. And very few of these slum homes have a safe supply of drinking water.

The Indian government wants to make the country slum-free by the year 2020 but it is a huge task and there aren't enough resources to relocate so many slum dwellers with more people arriving in India's cities from the countryside every day in search of a better life for themselves and their families.

More than 70% of India's population lives in the countryside and more and more people are migrating to the cities to find work because subsistence farming doesn't provide enough to make a living. There is a lack of investment in healthcare and education for rural communities and few employment opportunities, which is having disastrous consequences for many millions of people.

In October 2007, 25,000 landless workers, indigenous tribespeople and "untouchables" from the bottom of Indian society marched 320km to Delhi to highlight the growing poverty in which they live. While some parts of Indian society are enjoying the economic boom, other parts are suffering from rocketing inflation, higher food prices and the loss of their lands.

Government projects to promote Chinese-style special economic zones have displaced hundreds of thousands from their land, many of whom were not compensated or cheated on the price.

However, instead of focusing on the obvious poverty, the wealthy part of Indian society prefers to focus on newspaper headlines about record stock market highs, record mobile phone sales and record car production figures.

While incomes are going up and tens of thousands of new jobs are being created, the government of India cannot seem to generation essential investment in public services such as health, education, sanitation, public safety and housing.